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# NEXT SUNDAY

( Sketches and Essays )

R. K. NARAYAN

( Author of *The Financial Expert*, *Mr. Sampath*,  
*The English Teacher*, etc. )



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## THE RADIO LICENCE

I suddenly realised with a shudder that I was actually passing through the last moments of the grace period allowed for renewing a radio licence. I hurried to the nearest post-office counter and asked for a form. The man at the counter hesitated just for a second—perhaps he had a feeling that I might be making a collection of forms or using them (in office language) as 'One-side-paper'. I discovered later that this was not feasible, the form choking with inscriptions and dotted lines on every side. The man at the counter looked at me steadily and asked if I had taken out my licence at the same post-office previously, if not, where? This was a piece of cross-examination I could not face. Last year probably I had not burdened myself with a radio set, or perhaps I had authorised someone else to obtain a licence. I had a feeling that perhaps I was about to be charged with perjury. I gave some reply. The man at the counter gave me a form immediately. At the first glance I wanted to ask, "Why do they call it a Wireless Receiving Station? Is it in order to give the whole business a high-sounding name or shall I really have to say hereafter I am going back to my Wireless Receiving Station when I mean I am going home?" But I suppressed my question, not being sure that it was safe: there might be grave penalties attached to Contempt of Wireless Licence Form or Frivolous Conduct at Post-Office Counters. I swallowed my question and started writing on the form. First I had to write down my name '*In block letters*' as ordained.

In trying to write in block letters I misspelt my own name (it always happens when one has to write slowly in block letters, the simplest spelling is likely to elude one), I spoilt the form and had to ask for another with considerable apology ; and taking it home, I wrote down my name with great care, and then *Residence*, *Road*, *Locality* and *Town* left me thinking. The trouble was the road I live in has remained nameless for centuries : our municipality evidently has no faith in street names. My street is one of the five roads running north to south, and it is known the world over as the road to the right of the Concrete Water Tank on Vani Vilas Road, but obviously this would be too homely on a form ; and so on the inspiration of the moment I wrote down 'First Cross Road'. I felt that I was christening our street now without much fuss, and this was going to stay, unless someone on the Fifth Cross Road also decided to call his the First Cross ; in which case I had no doubt that mine would be known as the First First Cross Road and his the Second First Cross Road. Following this, there was a boxed space which confounded me, which required of me details as to *Occupation* (would they feel pleased if I said that my main occupation was hopefully waiting on my radio for good music ?). *Mother tongue* (why did they still stick to this old word, the current fashion being 'regional language'?) and the *number of members in the household* (what have they to do with it ?). In this last item should I include my cousin's son who happened to be staying with us at the moment, and were we to exclude the three junior-most members of the house, whose total years did not exceed nine ? I felt as if I were facing a census enumerator. Why did they ask so many questions ? I suddenly told myself, "I am, after all, an in-

significant operator of a wireless receiving set. Who am I to say what is important and what is not in a wireless licence form?" I bowed my head in humility and filled up the form. Soon came another portion which halted my progress: '*For working a wireless station at ... (Location of the station)*'. I wondered whether I should just be saying that the station would be located in the front passage of our house or did they expect me to say something else? The columns following it were by no means easy to tackle: *Serial No. of broadcast receiver, Manufacturer's name, type of model, Number of the Set, person from whom purchased*, etc., caused me acute anxiety. It was pleasing to reflect on the undying nature of a radio transaction, but mine was a mongrel set assembled by a homeless crank, no two bits in it having the same origin. How should I describe it?

Finally I managed to deal with the form to my entire satisfaction for down at the bottom of the page I discovered the wholesome advice '*Strike out the words not wanted*' and acted on it promptly; as a result of which only my name and door number remained on the form. I took it to the post-office, paid down fifteen rupees and went home with the licence in my pocket, feeling satisfied that I had paid the piper and could henceforth call the tune.

## FROG IN THE WELL

Everyone living within the bounds of his own surroundings may be viewed as a Frog in the Well. There is no need to be apologetic about it. The confines of the well may have their own merits : cool surroundings, soft moss-upholstered walls around, a brief day between sunrise and sunset when the sun appears over the pulley above, and heaven itself may mean nothing more than a circular blue patch above. But what is wrong in it ? Within his limits, the Wellsian (I use the word in the sense 'of the well') Frog may have his own routine of living, with occasional excitement when a human face peeps down at the rim either to draw water or throw itself down. The Frog has every reason to feel completely happy in his own world ; when he has to seek extrasocial life he may move on to another part of the pond and hobnob with fellow frogs and give himself over to community singing.

A lifetime may thus be spent, nobody being the worse for it. It is I suppose, what great poets and saints have hankered after. "This lime-tree bower my prison," says Coleridge. "Mine be a cot beside the hill," says another : which may mean, in effect, "Please leave me alone, to continue my days in my own well...."

But it is not easily achieved. Society presses upon one all the time. The progress of the last half a century may be described as the progress of the Frog out of his Well. All means of communication, all methods of speedy travel, all newspapers, broadcasts, and every kind of invention is calculated to keep up a barrage of attack on the Frog

in the Well. He will not be left alone. You may shut yourself away from all family business or gossip, but you cannot shut your ears to the cricket commentary coming over the air ; or you may dispense with your radio set, but your neighbour's will not leave you alone. Every hour of the day the air pulsates with varied reports, activities, advices, claims and warnings. The Frog may not know how to read, but that won't save him : the attack will be kept up through his ears, or he may be blissfully deaf, but it is probable that television will bring the market place or the battleground to his very hearth. With all this how is it ever possible for the Frog to remain in isolation ?

Yet it may not be such an undesirable state. It may be that ultimately we shall attain our peace of mind and tranquillity of nerves when we are able to revert to this stage. What is the busy politician's going on a holiday, shut away from all visitors and correspondence and files, except an effort to imitate the Wellsian Frog ? When we come to think of it the average citydweller's is a perfect instance of Frog in the Well. The man who has been brought up in a particular area spends practically all his life there : his club, his shop, his children's school, his neighbours and all his associations are there, and if his work compels him to go out, he creeps into the same bus and returns by the same bus each day, and looks forward to Sunday as a day when he need not go out of his own district. He may spend a lifetime without ever knowing what sort of life is being lived in the other fifty-odd divisions in the city. Professions also isolate people and keep them in watertight compartments. The professor of English confines his contacts strictly to those in his department, the lawyer's world is his chamber and the bar

association, the doctor's his clinic and the medical association, and in each place the joy, humour and philosophy of life is just what one can share with one's colleagues. I should like to know how many hours in a week a man of one profession, say an auditor, spends watching or listening to the problems of a mechanic in a workshop. Yet that is the only way in which one may escape the Frog state. One must also learn to take an interest in other people's affairs : the undischarged debts of a neighbour or the partition deeds of two quarrelling brothers, or the 'in-law' misdeeds in some other house must be viewed with the intensity of a personal problem. This tendency in some measure, perhaps only for its gossip value, is evident in villages and small-town societies rather than in big cities. If the Frog in the Well state is to be successfully abolished it will be necessary to induce people to cultivate a lot of prying interest in other people's affairs, openly, everywhere.

## HIGHER MATHEMATICS

There recently appeared a news item that a profound mathematical discovery has been made, a solution to a problem that has been bothering the minds of mathematicians for half a century, something that will build a 'mathematical bridge' between the forces within the universe as a whole and the forces within the nuclei of the atoms. Any news that mentions the atom becomes suspect these days. I only hope this does not mean that belligerent folk are going to be in possession of a new weapon ; a combination of figures and symbols with which to paralyse the thinking powers of an enemy nation. Apart from this, I view the news without emotion. This mathematical discovery may thrill some people, but it leaves me cold. Mathematics is a matter of constitution. It is like music. Some people are tone deaf and often wonder how any adult could go on sitting in a hall for three or four hours, tolerating the noise and gesticulations of a singer. In the same way I am, if I may coin an expression, "figure-blind." My mind refuses to work when it encounters numbers. Everything that has anything to do with figures is higher mathematics to me. There is only one sort of mathematics in my view and that is the higher one. To mislead young minds by classifying arithmetic as elementary mathematics has always seemed to me a base trick. A thing does not become elementary by being called so. "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet." However elementary we may pretend arithmetic to be, it ever remains puzzling, fatiguing and incalculable.

*There was a fashion in the elementary school in which I read to prescribe a book in which the sums were all about English life. The characters in the problems were all John and Joan and Albert, and the calculations pertained to apples and the fares of hansomcabs. In those days we saw apples only in coloured picture books and we never understood what hansomcabs meant. We were used to dealing in mangoes and jutkas and bullockcarts, and the payments were not in farthing or pence, but in rupees, annas and pies. While wrestling with the problems in this book I was always racked with the thought that perhaps I could solve the sums if they dealt with Indian life. Fortunately in answer to this prayer we soon had sums dealing with the interminable transactions of Rama and Krishna. But I soon found that this did not make things easier for me. The problems remained as tough as ever, and my wit and calculations remained defeated. My constant preoccupation was with the last section of the textbook where one found the answers to the problems. Every time I did a sum I turned to the last section with trembling and prayer, but I always found there a different figure from what I had arrived at laboriously. The disappointment reduced me to tears. A sense of hopeless frustration seized me each time I referred to the answer in the printed book. I sometimes wished I had been born in another world where there could be no mathematics. The whole subject seemed to be devised to defeat and keep me in a perpetual anguish of trial and error. I remember particularly that the sections which made absolutely no sense to me were called "Practice." The teacher decreed, "Find out by Practice" etc., and the intelligent boys of the class at once drew three vertical lines and did something or other with them. I never*

understood what they did with those and why it was called "Practice." To this day I have no idea; what it is all about. I also remained oblivious to the intricacies of stocks and shares and discount; these I viewed as the worst snares ever laid for a human being. I had a fear at one time that I might have to spend the rest of my life in a high school, arithmetic acting as a barrier to my exit ; but in every young heart at this stage there arises a hope of redemption, through algebra and geometry. It might only be a delusion to think that drawing a circle within a triangle (or is it the other way) could be easier than calculating  $3\frac{1}{4}$  and  $7\frac{7}{8}$  of something or other, or that the anonymous hooded figures of algebra were easier to tackle than quantities of mangoes and percentages. Any-way, one got out of high school with a feeling of escaping from a concentration camp, the greatest virtue of university education seeming to be that unless one chose one need not go near mathematics.

I don't think years have improved my outlook or equipment in regard to mathematics, although as a grown-up I am not supposed to give out my real feelings in the matter. I have to keep up appearances before youngsters. So that the other day when I found my nephew (who has evidently imbibed my tradition in mathematics) literally in tears, sitting at his desk and chasing an elusive sum, I told him patronisingly, "Well, there is no use shedding tears over mathematics. If you read the sum correctly and think it over calmly, I am sure you will get the answer. The thing is you must not be in a hurry. You must be very calm, I tell you. At your age, do you know how we were managing it ?" And I told him what I fully knew to be a cock-and-bull story about my prowess and industry in this subject. He asked, "Won't you help me do this sum?"

I looked at it critically. It was something about profit and loss. As I gazed at the sum, the answer suddenly flashed on my mind. I casually turned to the last page to see if my answer was correct. It wasn't. I gently put down the book, telling the boy, "Well, of course. I can do this sum but, you know, my 'working' will be different : it won't be much use to you. You must do it in the way it has been taught in your school ; moreover, you must learn to depend upon your own effort. Otherwise you will not learn." I hastily moved out of the pale of mathematics.

## GOVERNMENT MUSIC

When music comes to be nationalised the director-general of music will say in his administration report : 'During the period under review two thousand hours of vocal and sixteen hundred hours of instrumental music were provided for a total audience of 1,25,000....'

The nation's musical policy will, needless to say, bear the colour and stamp of the minister holding the portfolio. He may decree that a Fifty-five Year Plan for the musical revival and integration of the country through music should be taken up immediately. In order to facilitate the integration of north and south, it will be suggested that a south Indian audience should sit through a performance of north Indian music for a minimum of twelve hours each quarter, and *vice versa*. And the audience must show no boredom or weariness. Any sign of restlessness will be viewed as an unnatural activity. Yawning at such a function will be punishable with both fine and reprimand. Looking about for an exit will be interpreted as a lack of interest in the performance ; the burden of proving otherwise will be on the man so charged. In every *music sabha* there will be a government-appointed watch-and-ward inspector with a staff commensurate with the strength of the *sabha*. His business will be to keep an eye on the audience and see that people do not nod. If he sees someone nodding during a performance, he will be quite entitled to switch off the microphone of the singer and switch on his own microphone, which he will always keep cleverly concealed on his person, and cry, preferably in

a musical manner, "Wake up, citizens, this is not the time to sleep." His impressions in the matter shall be final during the recital. Disputes, if any, shall be referred to the Music Tribunal, which will meet once in three months at Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, and which shall have jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to music. Any member of the tribunal shall be entitled to enter any music *sabha* and stop the performance at whatever stage, without assigning any reason for his action, but it is understood this is purely a technical provision, to be used only in an emergency.

Musicians shall be recognised as the torchbearers of culture. For this purpose once every three years there shall be elected the grand musician of the Indian Republic, who shall be given a scroll with this honour inscribed thereon. He shall be entitled to one-and-a-half first class one way or air fare, whichever may be less, from his town of birth to the capital. He shall be assigned a definite precedence in all official banquets—his degree shall not be less than that of the chief conservator of forests and between the directors-general of fisheries and synthetic rice. He shall be given a basic salary and an absorbable allowance not exceeding one half of the maximum grade of the curator of a museum. He shall be entitled to a pre-audited allowance for throat pastilles, coffee, *pan* or such mood-inducing articles. It must be recognised that musicians and all artistes are men of moods. Every effort must be made to accord recognition to this fact. However, music being a nationalised activity, coming within the Fifty-five Year Plan, and the government being anxious not to lose valuable time, musicians will be well-advised to retain their good moods, as far as possible. The words 'as far as possible' are used advisedly, just to indicate that

every effort will be made to treat a musician's moods with tolerance and understanding. In this the musician shall also accord the maximum cooperation possible, in the following manner : whenever he is likely to get into an undesirable mood which is apt to mar a performance, the musician shall send an advance notice of it to the director of meteorology, who shall incorporate it in his daily weather report. When it is done the artiste shall be deemed to be on leave with average pay. Such a period shall not be counted against his total leave unless it is extended beyond ten days, which will not be sanctioned unless accompanied by a life certificate.

The government has no reason to doubt that it is moving on the right lines. Composers are particularly requested to remember that, while the government recognise the fact that every freedom should be given to artistes and no restriction should be placed on them in any manner since Art will flourish only in an atmosphere of the greatest freedom, we are now living in a secular state and the Fifty-five Year Plan holds top priority. It is desirable that composers, in addition to their usual preoccupation with love, devotion, etc., compose songs that will give our villagers (remember that the real India is in its 500,000 villages) an incentive to try the Japanese method of rice cultivation, conserve topsoil, and mend their own roads and drains without waiting for government help. We have no doubt that the future of our country, as well as world peace, depends upon the revival of our music, which can be achieved only through the successful working of our Fifty-five Year Plan.

## FIFTEEN YEARS

Language has become a profoundly embarrassing subject nowadays. The thought of it gives a peace-loving citizen a pain in the neck. I mean it with particular reference to the English language. An average citizen today is in the position of appreciating the language but not wanting it. We are not so far away from the time when people used to say as a matter of prestige, "He speaks perfect English," and a bride who could write her letters in English and who could claim to have read Scott and Dickens was considered fully accomplished. In the matter of employment, too, a young man who could draft an English letter with ease and confidence stood a better chance of being employed than the one who was proficient only in the regional language. And there were people who didn't know English, and who said with a sigh, "If I had only learned English I would have conquered the world---." This may not be a very comfortable memory for anyone now, but it would be false to pretend that such values did not exist at one time. However various causes, practical, political, etc., have demanded the abolition of English from our midst. It is almost a matter of national propriety and prestige now to declare one's aversion to this language, and to cry for its abolition.

But the language has a sirenlike charm and a lot of persistence, and (if we may personify it) comes up again and again and demands, "What have I done that you hate me so much?" The judge does not lift up his head for fear that he might weaken. He assumes the gruffest

tone possible and says, "You are the language of our oppressors. It is through you that our nation was enslaved, and it is only through you that the people were divided, so that those who were masters of English could rule others who didn't know the language. Your insidious influence wrought a cleavage in our own midst—"

"You speak very good English."

"Well, well, I won't be flattered by it," says the judge. "All of us are masters of English, but that proves nothing. You are the language of those who were our political oppressors. We don't want you any more in our midst. Please, begone."

"Where shall I go?"

"To your own country—"

"I am afraid this is my country. I fear I will stay here, whatever may be the rank and status you may assign me-- as the first language or the second language or the thousandth. You may banish me from the classrooms, but I can always find other places where I can stay. I love this country where :

'Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,  
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy.'

"That is a beautiful Shakespeare passage. However, I cannot allow the court's time to be wasted in this manner. You have a knack of beguiling the mind with quotations. I forbid you to quote anything from English literature."

"Why are you dead set against me, sir ? I have a fundamental right to know why you are throwing me out, under the Indian Constitution. . . ."

"But it doesn't apply to you."

**"Why not?"**

"Because you are not an Indian."

"I am more Indian than you can ever be. You are probably fifty, sixty or seventy years of age, but I've actually been in this land for two hundred years."

"When we said, 'Quit India,' we meant it to apply to Englishmen as well as their language. And there doesn't seem to be much point in tolerating you in our midst. You are the language of the imperialist, the red-tapist, the diabolical legalist, the language which always means two things at the same time."

"I am sorry, but red tape, parliament and courts have a practical purpose in having a language which can convey shades of meaning and not something outright. This reminds me: have you got the criminal and civil procedure codes in the language of the country now? And have you standardised this language of the country? I remember the case of a humble author who got his English works translated in Hindi but later had to put away the manuscripts in cold storage."

**"Why?"**

"He had the translations done by a pundit who appeared to him very good. Not being very proficient in the language, the author accepted what the pundit said as being gospel truth and thought that the translations were unimpeachable. But when he showed the manuscript to others one set of persons condemned it for being too full of Sanskrit words, and another set condemned it for being full of Urdu words. Not being able to decide the issue himself the author put the manuscript out of sight. The moral of this story is...."

"You need not concern yourself with all this problem. We want you to go."<sup>12</sup>

"You probably picture me as a trident-bearing Rule Britannia, but actually I am a devotee of Goddess Saraswati. I have been her most steadfast handmaid."

"All that is beside the point. Even if you come in a sari with *kumkum* on your forehead we are going to see that you are deported. The utmost we shall allow you will be another fifteen years...."

"Fifteen years from what time?" asked the English language, at which the judge felt so confused that he ordered, "I will not allow any more discussion on this subject," and rose for the day.

## THE TRUE WALKER

When I read in the papers the other day that Mr. Thomas Corder Catchpool, a well-known British walker, 69, died of exhaustion while climbing Monte Rose, Switzerland's high mountain, I could not help the thought that he probably died a true walker's death. The man who loves walking for its own sake views the highway or the mountain path as his legitimate home, and would rather be found dead there than alive in an invalid's chair. To one devoted to walking, the home or any kind of shelter is but an interruption, a necessary evil. It is necessary because the rest of the people are all there. If he were a misanthrope he need not seek their company at all because he knows that he and they are incompatibles, and that he could well leave them alone and still miss nothing in life. But he cannot be a misanthrope. He likes to meet them even if they are different from him, wishing all the time that they could share his joy of walking, but he knows it would be futile to wait for their conversion. He knows the very depressing and inescapable fact that he is something of an exception in his circle. He is aware of the very disheartening statistics that there is only one walking enthusiast for every ten thousand adults.

This is a world in which at present there are more persons willing to watch a walker or talk about him than are ready to follow his example. But it is a happy sign that though every man who appears to be devoted to walking is secretly viewed as a crank, no one

has openly found it possible to deny the virtues of walking. The most stagnant of men could be heard to say, "Well, I used to walk half a dozen miles a day before I . . ." it may be a very serious complaint of foot or of the heart and if he is now following the mobile habits of a heavy oak table, it is strictly under doctor's orders. No one is so depraved yet as to declare openly his sentiments against the practice of walking. He does it only by sly hints that the walker is a harmless eccentric, a description which the walker does not mind, being really a harmless person, his association with the open spaces and constant contemplation of the horizons having naturally imparted a breadth to his outlook. It is the reason why he never utters a word of protest when a non-walker proclaims that he would be walking six miles a day but for want of time. It is a well-known formula, which the walker has heard a hundred times, but he is too polite to correct the man by telling him, "After all, if you are really intent upon walking, you will have to find only ninety minutes to do this six-mile-a-day. Surely, you could scrape this out of the vacant meanderings you do about your house when you have nothing specific to do. It is the easiest thing to find this hour and a half out of your twenty-four, and let me assure you, if you do it, you will be happier, healthier and wiser." There are some who say that they would go on long walks if only they could get someone to accompany them. This is such a ridiculous statement that, but for his inborn tact, the walker would burst into a loud laugh with the comment, "Fancy wanting a companion for a walk!" The true walker avoids all company. The best companion for a walk is oneself—this being a grand opportunity for sifting and analysing life and people and coming to a

conclusion over so many matters. Here company is untenable. You might as well say that you are unable to contemplate the sunset unless you have a companion chattering away at your side. The true walker, even if he has been with himself for six hours, will never say, "I have been out with the greatest bore on earth, namely myself," for one's mind attains such resilience while one walks that there can be no place for boredom. If there is a defect in the walker worth noting, it is his insatiety. There is no limit to his desire to cover distances. He calculates within himself, "Six miles a day, one hundred and eighty miles a month, over two thousand miles a year, why should I not go round the world on foot?" There is really no limit to his zeal. He ever attempts to reach the horizon.

## PROPHETS IN OUR MIDST

Every weekly paper worth its name carries today a section of prophecy. Most people have got into the habit of turning to it before opening any other page. I may claim to be an occasional member of this class myself. I should certainly be a more devout reader of this page if only it had a little more variety. As it is I find a lot of repetition and monotony in all that they say on this page. If you are this or that, you find that you fall into a category ; your fate is classified, your outlook, conduct and prospects are all classified. You are no longer so and so. You become a group, which will enjoy or suffer such and such conditions under such and such specific influences. You (and a dozen others of your class) will have a few family squabbles during the first two days of the week. It may be you will have some financial troubles too. It is advisable not to attempt any new enterprises if your mind is running on those lines. Don't get into an argument with anyone under any provocation the first three days of the week. (Excellent advice for all time !) Good time if you are undertaking a long voyage or thinking of buying and selling ivory. For beneficial effects wear cat's-eye during this period. At first I used to feel apprehensive that my week was starting so badly and almost wished that I could change myself from something to something else, lift myself astronomically out of the existing circumstances. I felt that it was not going to be easy for me to limit myself to a curt "Yes" or "No" when speaking to others ; I felt that it was going

to be impossible not to expand a subject or contradict others. I looked with terror on the other members of the family, thinking that the whole lot of them were waiting to come down on me if I relaxed my vigil and uttered a single indiscreet remark. The bright spot in regard to a long voyage or a deal in ivory was not of interest to me, for, however propitious the time might be, I was not going to undertake them. All that propitiousness simply had to go waste. Don't be depressed by any of this. This is only a temporary phase. If you have the hardihood to go through the rest of the prophecy, you will find that all this is reversed very soon. If you suffer frustration during the first three days of the week, you may be sure you will have middling fortune for a day at the end of it and thereafter you will find things going on swimmingly. The prospects will brighten up during the last two days of the week, the clouds surrounding one's financial affairs will lift, the storm will pass, and friends and relations will display a more live-and-let-live attitude. While I read this I have a sneaking satisfaction that a group of persons who seemed to have had too good a time at the beginning of the week are now going to have trouble from relatives and bankers, snubbing from officials, general frustration in all attempts, the time being good only for undertaking an impossible tour, or the buying and selling of ivory or some such commodity.

Going through it, it seems to be a monotonous business, good times and bad times popping up like cards out of a pack. But what is wrong in it? After all, life consists of prosperity, adversity, success, failure, friendship and hostility, popularity and ignominy. This is all that can be had of life, and what can any astrologer do more

than serve it up again and again, especially when a demand is made on him to say something week after week, and when he has only a limited number of sun and moon and stars to handle ?

The street astrologer is a relic of the times when literacy was less widespread, and when all suggestion and instruction to the bulk of the population had to be conveyed orally. We still see a lot of them, here and there on pavements, especially the man with the oracle bird, a sparrowlike bird which is trained to come out of its cage, pick up an inscribed card out of a stack, and go back to its cage, its chief inducement to have a peck at the future being the grain that is held out to it by its owner at the end of every performance. The man reads aloud the inscription on the card picked by the bird, which sets forth a message for the client sitting before him : the message will be in verse set in a high-flown obscure language, which may require a commentator to explain its sense. This man makes no claim to mystic knowledge and does not care to have his appearance impose on his customers : he views himself with the detachment of a postal messenger, simply as one who carries equipment for reading the future. He even refuses to explain the meaning of the verse he reads out, his business being over with the mere reading ; it is up to others to make out the sense. The ordinary street astrologer cannot afford to display so much detachment. He has to keep up appearances. He has to watch closely his client's face before proceeding with his prophecy. I once watched a man surrounded by anxious clients under a wayside tree. He held a slate in his hand, asked his customer to name a flower or a number, wrote down intricate calculations on the slate, and remarked, "The present moment is not very good for

you . . . " and looked up to see if his client also thought so, and then elaborated the point ; after that he whispered, "All the mischief is due to one of your relatives. I won't name the person now. You know as well as I do that this person has no friendly intentions towards you. . . ." This again was immediately confirmed and he ended up with the statement that in a short while things would improve.

## PROTESTS

The itch to dash off a letter to a newspaper is deeply ingrained in every one of us today. This is a modern version of the bell rope dangling in front of a king's palace, which was tugged by anyone with a complaint to make, night or day, and which immediately brought forth the king to inquire what was wrong. It was all right in those days when sovereignty was a traceable factor, vested in a king ; but as political ideas and institutions develop, sovereignty becomes a complex factor, difficult to pick out, as may be judged by a favourite question that occurs in political science papers : "Locate sovereignty in a modern state," a question calculated to involve an under-graduate in argument and research, and leave him crushed and exhausted in the end. An ordinary citizen, who wishes to present a petition or protest, cannot easily locate the final authority in an up-to-date secretariat. He will find himself forwarded with compliments from table to table. He will go about always racked with the thought that he is addressing the wrong quarters. When he desires to spare himself this travail he does the next best thing : writes a letter to a newspaper. Anyone who has been in a newspaper office knows what an immense quantity of letters arrive by every post, addressed to the editor, each chronicling some protest or grievance. With the best will in the world, only a portion of it gets published, mainly due to want of space. Incidentally, it makes me think that a daily paper devoted solely to the publishing of letters from readers, called the "Daily Protest," may

have an assured future. The need to protest is an imperative one, like food or sleep. Protesting, not only against the existing order of things (which is actually accomplished by voting), but against every kind of institution or condition, is man's birthright. The protesting instinct is a potent one. No one can foresee when it will be roused to make a man fulminate against this or that. As an instance, a few days ago I received a letter with a new type of stamp on its envelope. Presently I caught myself thinking, "When will our post-offices develop a more civilised way of defacing stamps ? It does not seem to be of much use designing elaborately artistic or significant stamps if you are going to black them out ruthlessly when they are used." The stamp on my envelope showed traces of a saintly figure but I could not find out who it was, the features of the saint as well as all explanatory lettering being covered by post-office smudge. Sometimes I have felt exasperated by the way post cards are dealt with : the smudge covering up message and address alike. This at least I could explain away to myself by thinking that the department probably wished to discourage the use of post cards. But these ornamental stamps, portraying saints, poets and philosophers, are different : people have a right to expect that they would be delivered to them intact. Another candidate, as the Americans would say, for our protesting instincts is the all-India radio ; with the best of aims this institution seems to rouse the ire of the largest number of persons. The latest score that some persons have against it is in regard to the national programme, which one may hear (if one chooses) late at night on a Saturday. I heard a consummate protestor declare, " 'national programme' ! Hearing *Durbari* (or our *Kanada*) every Sunday without the slightest discernable

variation at the same hour is a sore trial, however eminent the artiste may be. I want to write to someone strongly protesting against this programme. It seems to me only a *Durbari Rag* programme ; they cannot make a thing 'national' by labelling it so. I want to protest very strongly against this attitude."

Local self-government and general administration are also a steady target for the protestor. The confirmed protestor serves a valuable social purpose. It is his loudly uttered grousing that make authorities take notice of things. I have a feeling that the protesting class is not sufficiently organised, it is scattered far and wide, there is not enough coordination among its members. The thing to do, it seems to me, is to have a national protests week. It may sound odd, but I see no reason why it should sound odder than compost week. I heartily commend the inauguration of protests week all over the country. In every town the organisers should gather the citizens in public places, explain to them the philosophy of protest, and encourage everyone to come on the platform and utter his protest through a loud-speaker. The subject of fulmination may range from the scheme of the universe to an unattended drain in a side lane. All the protests will be duly recorded, all such records will be collected at a central place and formed into a single national register of protests. It is bound to prove a valuable document since our whole progress in a modern state depends upon the volubility and steadiness with which protests are uttered. When its importance is realised, I believe all nations will hold consultations among one another and evolve a common code for giving the protestor his due place in this world.

## ALLERGY

There are two aspects of medicine, the concrete and the abstract. The concrete used to be seen in cases such as malaria, cold, etc., unmistakable troubles for which well-known remedies were provided out of bottles. The sufferer drained off the medicine with a wry face, demanded a pinch of sugar to counteract the bitterness on the tongue, repeated the procedure, and then forgot all about it. This was the good old medical system as practised in any normal L. F. Dispensary (it took me long years to understand that L. F. stood for Local Fund). The doctor wrote a great deal on the leaves of a brown register. Although the ink used was faint and dilute, the entries afforded a rough-and-ready cross-section view of public health. After every 'name' and 'age' there was a column for 'disease'. This column was invariably filled with malaria, influenza and indigestion, in a regular pattern, with an occasional 'general debility' thrown in, whenever something turned up which seemed to be beyond this classification. The good old doctor wrote with one hand while feeling the pulse of his patient with the other. The compounder in the adjacent room issued ready-made mixtures out of gigantic bottles and placed his stamp on the prescriptions with an air of dismissing sickness for ever. I have lost touch with this institution, but I believe that it is not so popular now as it used to be. Nowadays people do not like things to remain so elementary and simple.

The days of glancing at the tongue and dashing off

'mist' this or 'mist' that, are past. Bitter medicines with a pinch of sugar are unacceptable to a modern mind. This is an age of scientific outlook, or at least of scientific terminology. A thing has no value unless it is clothed in respectable scientific expression. Everybody has recognised the hypnotic value of scientific or scientific-sounding phrases. Manufacturers of various beautifying commodities nowadays are trying to attract clientele by claiming that their products contain this element or that principle or some fabulous vitamin. Medical science is also progressing on these lines. Doctors' clinics have been resounding with new terms for over a decade now. Vitamins became very popular at one time. An elaborate vitamin-consciousness developed in people, driving them to maintain a perpetual hunt for vitamins in all their diet. It was followed by calcium deficiency. Even now the cry is all calcium deficiency, but one suspects that it has fallen into a routine and the fervour is lost. And then came a time when no doctor would look at a patient unless he had all his teeth pulled out first. The trend of medicine seems to have been all along from the seen to the unseen. Medical science is becoming more and more metaphysical.

I am saying this with the thought in my mind that we are hearing the word 'allergy' too much nowadays. Calcium and vitamin seem to have yielded the place of honour to allergy. In a week I heard four different doctors mention allergy under four different conditions. A person who was suffering from rashes was said to be in a state of allergy. A person who was racked with cough was also said to be undergoing allergy. Another who was feeling fidgety was also allergic. And another nearly unconscious with high fever was pronounced to

be in a state of allergy. This is a very generous and compendious word meaning anything. It is applied to every kind of symptom from sprained toes to raving mania. When a doctor says of some symptom, "Oh, it's just allergy," he seems to say in effect, "Don't bother me with this any more. I don't know how you have got it, and I can't tell you how you can be rid of it. Grin and bear it until it leaves you. God knows when...." It satisfies the doctor that he has looked over the case as best as he could, and the patient that he has had the benefit of expert advice. When a doctor says that it is just allergy he also implies that you must cure yourself of it after discovering the cause that led to it. It takes a person on through a process of self-analysis and self-discovery. Allergy has converted the doctor's room into a confessional. While you are writhing with pain or irritation you will hear the doctor say, "Just throw your mind back and see where you have erred. Just recollect all the things you have eaten, all the clothes you have worn and all the thoughts that have passed in your mind, pick out the thing that has caused this and avoid it; that's all, and you will be well again." There is a great deal of comfort in this process. It is good to think that a hammering toothache is thoroughly unreal, and is a fancied state caused by that horsehair stuffing in the sofa you sat upon, or the attack of asthma which twists you up is an illusory condition which you could have easily avoided if you had not bothered about those unpaid bills. If this process is followed I am sure it will be possible to say someday, pointing at a passing funeral, "That man is not dead, but is only allergic to life."

## THE NEED FOR SILENCE

Public speaking is a habit-forming activity, like coffee or tobacco, and so many have now got into the habit that at present there are more speakers than listeners in our midst. The balance is very unfavourable to the speaker, and I often conjure up before my mind the picture of a habitual speaker leaving home every evening with a bundle of books and notes under his arm in search of an audience. He will look into every gathering in the town, but he will not get his chance to speak unless somewhere the speaker or the chairman announced for the evening disappoints, and the organiser of the meeting spots him in time. And we may be sure that he will never say "No" to any invitation to speak, even if it be only as a stopgap, for his greatest delight in life is to hear his own voice. He often thinks of America as a blessed land where people actually pay for and listen to lectures, as a contrast to this land where a speaker will have to entice his audience by every means at his command, and if a fee is to be paid the one who is entitled to it is the listener rather than the speaker. We are gradually becoming more and more speech resistant, a fact which our public speakers will do well to bear in mind whenever they go near a microphone.

Public life is becoming an extremely trying business for most eminent men--almost every evening a speech, and each time on a fresh subject according to the nature and purpose of the assembly. The eminent man will have to speak on *ajanta* paintings now, and at the next meeting

on the value of green manure. He will have to be ready to speak on any subject. He will have to speak with the tongue of angel, prophet, philosopher, friend or guide, as the occasion demands it. The instructor of the masses today is not the teacher in the classroom or the lone scholar in his study, but the man who has attained an eminent position through votes and has the energy to harangue the public every evening. This can be a very exhausting piece of work, and it is well known that many eminent men are compelled by sheer stress of work to engage secretaries to draft their speeches. It is a well-known practice, and the public is not likely to think any the less of an eminent person's versatility on account of it—as long as the secretary remembers to number the pages and fasten the sheets securely. I remember a meeting where a lecturer started reading his written speech. He read through a sheet, removed it and put it at the back of the last sheet in his hand and continued, but the speech would (or could) not come to an end, although the gentleman seemed to be holding only half-a-dozen typed sheets in his hand. Presently the audience felt that there was a ring of familiarity about the sentences; it was not until the lecturer had gone two complete rounds that the public realised that they were being treated to an *encore* without asking for it. It was presently discovered that the lecturer's secretary had evidently failed to number the sheets or pin them together.

The world is witnessing the greatest straining of vocal chords today in various ways, with an equal strain, naturally, on the eardrums too. The time has come for us to reconsider the whole question from a humanistic standpoint. We must speak less if we are to survive as a species. The jungle animals will steal a march on us by

their very muteness. We must recover our strength through silence. It is my hobby to invent new occasions for nationwide celebration. Why should we not start a silence week all over the country? During that week no speech should be delivered under any circumstance and, following it, newspapers must undertake not to print reports of any speech two days in a month, and the post office might also help by stamping on cards and covers the slogan 'speak less' or better, 'don't talk'. Every eminent person must be given a quota card in regard to public speeches. Every public figure will be permitted to speak only five hundred sentences a year, which he may use up as he chooses. Whether he expounds national policies, opens bridges, lays foundation stones, launches a grow-more-pumpkins campaign or delivers convocation addresses, it will be his duty to work within the five-hundred-sentence quota. All things considered, it is a very liberal allowance, and anyone who exceeds his quota must be dealt with severely, as befitting a tormentor of mankind.

## HORSES AND OTHERS

I had a most illuminating conversation with the driver of a tonga a few days ago. All along the way from the market he kept explaining why we should have more and more horses in our midst. His talk made me yearn for a horse and carriage. Its economics were alluring. You could own a turn-out for an outlay of five hundred rupees. What vehicle could you hope to acquire for this value? You could maintain a horse on two rupees a day and engage a driver for less than thirty rupees a month. You did not have to visit a workshop every morning as most motor owners do. Perhaps you might have to go to a vet or look for medicinal leaves if the horse caught a cold or slight fever, but one ought not to grudge this little attention to an animal which took one about, generally without any trouble, thirty miles a day. The horse created a salubrious atmosphere all around, it made the surroundings auspicious enough for Goddess Lakshmi to come and reside in.

His talk gave me a glimpse of a world with which we are fast losing touch—the world of the horse, its trappings, the perfume of leather upholstery, the shining brass lamps with little green crystals stuck at their sides, the fragrance of steaming gram, and, above all, the coachman with his coat buttoned up to his neck and his turban, and his hand lightly resting on the whip handle. My mind went back to the days when my uncle had a carriage in Madras. I don't know what they called it : phaeton, dogcart, victoria, governess (or governor's ?) cart. It was a yellow carriage

with windows, and benchlike seats inside. You could sit comfortably facing other passengers and also watch out of the window. The driver's seat was screened off with a panel. He sat high up, and you had to put your head out and tell him where to go and when to stop. It was a beautiful experience. You had to warn him a couple of hours ahead what your programme for the day would be since he had much to do before getting the horse and carriage ready for the road. He had to groom the horse ('malish', as we heard him call the process), strap on to it various leather bits, give it gram and water, and tuck a small quantity of green grass under his footrest for the way, which engendered a perpetual smell of green grass about this vehicle.

The double-bullock cart with its arched springs and mat-covered roof is another thing that comes to my mind. It may be the trick of reminiscence that endows it with so much charm now. One of the most enchanting memories of this kind of locomotion was an all-night journey I had to undertake years ago when I returned home for the summer vacation, the train putting me down thirty miles from my town. The bullock carts moved in a caravan, winding along a dark, tree-shaded highway. Robbers were known to attack such caravans about ten miles from the railway station at midnight. This menace was warded off by a simple expedient. One of the cartmen walked ahead carrying a lantern and a staff and throwing blood-curdling challenges to the night air, "Hey ! Keep away, prowlers, if you don't want to have your skulls pulped. . . . Who goes there ?" and so forth, the other drivers also sitting up and urging their bullocks on with the loudest swear-words. This was kept up till we passed a jutting rock beyond the twelfth milestone ; the moment

we crossed this spot the challenger went back to his cart, curled himself in his seat and fell asleep, the entire caravan following this example. By some strange law or understanding the robbers never seemed to step an inch beyond the jutting rock. It always seemed to me that the robbers were wasting a fine opportunity to attack with all the cart men fast asleep and the only wakeful person being myself as I tried to sleep on a pile of straw expecting any moment to be killed. But nothing happened and we reached our destination sometime the next day, the jingling of ox bells persisting in a re-echo for nearly a week after the journey.

Death due to movement, in various forms, is an inescapable condition of living today. We move about and carry on our work, dodging an oncoming wheel all the time. 'Caution . . .', 'speed limit . . .', 'school zone', 'halt and proceed' are all there, but is there anyone who takes these instructions seriously? The pedestrian is the only person likely to notice these signs, with every chance of being knocked down while pausing to study the directions meant for the motorist. In a world where the pedestrian seems to be of so little account—he is blinded by motor lights, deafened by screeching horns and chased about by reckless speed fiends—it is soothing to think of a horse and carriage or a bullock cart.

## THE VANDAL

The real old-time vandal came in as an invader, if not a conqueror. The moment he marched in he picked up a hammer and knocked out the noses of all the sculptured figures in his new domain, and he alas spent considerable time breaking their arms and legs. He carried out his task as a matter of routine. After this, if he saw any building of architectural value standing he lost no time in demolishing it.

This was a conscious and deliberate vandal who did what he did because he had the strength and the chance to do it. He probably told himself, "Well, there is too much art plaguing the world anyway let me do my bit to mitigate it." There is no way of remedying this man's handiwork. We have to accept it as a historical process, but the work of the not-so-historical vandal is the one that should cause us concern now. I visited an ancient temple recently, famed for the minute sculptural work on its pillars, walls and ceiling. Painstaking work by ancient craftsmen was in evidence everywhere, but even more painstaking were the efforts of those who had attempted to effect improvements later.

These should be called the real vandals. They seem to have been telling themselves, "It was all very well for the old sculptors to have attempted so much, but they don't seem to have paid much attention to brightening up their surroundings." And forthwith they sanctioned out of the temple funds the purchase of large quantities of aluminium paint, cement, lime and mortar, and plastered

every cornice, wall and pillar with lime or cement. Figures that could not be so easily dealt with were given two special coatings of aluminium paint, with the comment, "Now there is something to be proud of. The figures look as if made of silver." Actually the figures now look as if they had been shaped out of old aluminium vessels. I noticed cigarette foils also employed for effecting improvements. A huge quantity of it was used for covering the inlay work on an inner door. I could not help asking the temple authority for an explanation of his activities. He said, "You know this is a famous temple, and our minister visits it often. I shouldn't like to give him the impression that we are neglecting it in any way."

The vandal in authority is the person to be most dreaded today. He is capable of making a hash of the architectural pattern of an entire town. He can never set eyes on a building without wanting to do something or other with it. His words carry weight with the executives following him, with notebooks in hand, when he is out on inspection. When he points at a building and suggests improvements, those behind dare not contradict him. The building may be a concrete, streamlined modern structure, but he may order a huge lotus bud to be carved on its top, or he may demand that floral designs be carved on its pillars, or that the entire building be given a dome and Mogul turrets; or an ancient French-villa-type building may suffer the addition of an utterly modernistic cantilever.

Vandalism may be direct and obvious, as in the instances above, or it may also be hidden or implied. I cannot stand the sight of unfading crepe flowers in vases. Putting crepe flowers in vases is an act of vandalism according to me. Shiny plastic curtains over doors and

windows give me an uneasy feeling ; also the sight of indiscriminate assemblage of ferns and potted plants in verandas, or monstrous creepers trained up to cover an entire building. This is an entirely personal view. I am sure that the man who has gathered those flowerpots or hung those curtains views them as achievements and may not care to be labelled a vandal in his own home. I respect his sentiment. I shall never let him see my own catalogue listing what, according to me, are vandalisms. Each individual is free to draw up his own list.

There cannot be what may be termed a standard list of vandalisms which may be of use to those about to undertake the task of furnishing their homes and surroundings, howevermuch we might standardise the pattern of society. Those that love calendar pictures will not rest till they cover the walls of their homes with all the calendars issued on the new year by all the business concerns in the country; a lover of group photos will cover every inch of space in his home with portraits of all the friends and relations that ever came his way; the organiser who is determined to sell space in the music hall will ever hang placards announcing the virtues of asafoetida or soap on every pillar there, and the man who is bent upon painting his home deep blue and illuminating it with an abundance of green tube light must have his way. When confronted with such acts we gently avert our looks and mumble indistinctly rather than shout our views from housetops. It is in the interests of harmonious human relations. It would be unseemly otherwise. But the line must be drawn somewhere. When the vandal emerges from the privacy of his home or immediate surroundings and attempts at improving nature or art on a large, public scale, then it is time for us to start an uninhibited 'down with—' campaign against him.

## TO A HINDI ENTHUSIAST

You are naturally devoted to the language which is as natural to you as swimming is to a fish. But you do not realise that a dry-land creature like me canno' step into the water with the same confidence. Aquatic competence (even more so amphibian competence) can be acquired only with hard practice. Practice implies time. Time alone can mature certain things. You feel fifteen years is a long enough time. In a matter like the nation-wide adoption of a language you cannot fix a timetable in advance. You cannot command a tree to put forth fruit on such and such a date. You cannot stop the waves on a seashore, as King Canute ably demonstrated long ago. One may multiply instances and analogies, but the point is really this : ripeness is all, as Shakespeare has said somewhere. Ripeness cannot be forced by a government order or even by the recommendations of a commission. You cannot coerce nature, and the rooting and growth of a language is a natural process. You must first shake off the notion that the time element is all important. It is not. It can be altered, the more easily because it is in the constitution. Do not look so outraged at this suggestion. You know as well as I do that any constitution worth its name must be amended, if not forgotten.

Do not imagine that I underrate the urgency of the question. That the country should stir itself from the spell cast on it by a foreign language is a point that anyone will readily grant, although, personally, I think otherwise. For me, at any rate, English is an absolutely *swadeshi*

language. English, of course, in a remote horoscopic sense, is a native of England, but it enjoys, by virtue of its uncanny adaptability, citizenship in every country in the world. It has sojourned in India longer than you or I and is entitled to be treated with respect. It is my hope that English will soon be classified as a nonregional Indian language.

You have perhaps a suspicion that we in this part of the country are not sufficiently devoted to the cause. Let me assure you that we are in dead earnest and putting forth our best efforts. Our homes resound with Hindi declensions night and day. The domestic atmosphere is fully Hindi, let me assure you. South Indian womanhood, at any rate, has lent the cause its unstinted support. It may be that the men here are not showing equal competence or application for the task. It is because they are still entangled in the sordid business of working for a living and do not have the time or the energy for mastering a new language, but our women are forging ahead with single-minded devotion. Their zeal has made men nervous. Multi-lingualism is threatening to invade our homes too. Women flaunt their Hindi with undisguised glee; men do not understand a word of it. Presently we may need interpreters in every home for the efficient management of home affairs. Women's zeal is such that men, in their selfishness, sometimes wonder if they will attend to anything else at home, a rather unprogressive fear. Women do attend to both home and Hindi. As the season of *Visharad* or some such examination approaches, it is a common sight in any household to find the lady putting in twenty-three hours of study, all the while carrying on all her routine domestic activities. While her left hand holds open the textbook under her

eyes, her right hand prepares the meal, washes the clothes and rocks the cradle. The indications are that presently an average south Indian housewife will prove an adept not only in Hindi but also in the use of a single hand for various purposes. I could not help asking a certain lady why she went through all this travail. She did not say that she felt it to be a national duty or that she hoped to be recruited to the I.A.S., but simply, "I find it interesting, that is all." This is what I would like you to note. Leave it to our good sense and pleasure and nothing will go amiss. It is not necessary to hold threats to your fellow men who, after all, belong to the same civilization. It is odious to be told, "You will not get your salary or your ration card unless you speak this tongue or that."

Here are my tips if you want Hindi to flourish in this part of the country:

Do not send us postal stationery with Hindi inscriptions on them. At the moment it only puzzles and irritates us, and wastes a lot of our time as we try to divine where to write what. Form-filling, even with the old money-order form with its payee and remitter (instead of sender and receiver), has been a trying business, always making one pause to wonder whether one was a payee or a remitter, but with Hindi text on it, it is becoming just impossible to get through any business at a post-office counter nowadays. It is childish to imagine that by sending us Hindi forms you are making us more Hindi-conscious. Shall we supply your post offices with forms and stationery printed in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada ? That would at least give this whole business a sportive and reciprocal touch.

Secondly, try to make your textbooks attractive, not

only in contents but in format. I may say without fear of contradiction that some of the Hindi textbooks I have seen are the shoddiest specimens of book production in the world. The *Rashtrabhasha* deserves a more dignified dress. Flimsy newsprint pages, thin coloured covers, smudgy blocks of indifferent drawings and a stiff price are the components of a Hindi textbook as far as my observation goes. It should be possible to spend a little more on paper and production, seeing that every book of this kind has an assured sale of several thousand copies each year. Remember that half the charm of English was engendered by the manner in which its school-books were produced, at least in old days. I still keep with me an old Nelson Reader, nearly forty years old. I still get a peculiar delight out of turning its pages: its exquisite coloured frontispiece showing some London bridge and river and towers in a fog, its thick and smooth pages, its typographical excellence and, above all, its carefully selected contents with relevant black and white pictures, all these have in a subtle and unseen manner helped the language in this country.

## ' NO SCHOOL TODAY '

By the time one comes to the stage of being called an adult one has left behind all the travails of school-going. One does not entertain any worry on that account. It is one of the few compensations of age. One could afford to look on with detachment at all the children hurrying along with their satchels. And then one forgets one's past so much as to admonish some child who may show reluctance to move in the direction of school. Most of us are guilty of such forgetfulness. It makes us say, "It is a pity that the present generation is developing on these lines. In our days, school was something which we looked forward to with pleasant anticipation. In fact we used to hate our holidays and vacations." Sheer falsehood. Adulthood may be defined as a phase of self-deception. Nowhere is it carried to a greater extent than in statements beginning : "In those days...." The listener, inevitably not a contemporary but one of a younger generation, has no courage to contradict the man nor has he any means of checking the veracity of his statement. No adult ever speaks the truth about his schooldays, partly out of bad memory and partly out of diplomacy. The man does not want his child to take his schooling casually. But the fact remains that no child with red blood in its veins could ever think of its school with unqualified enthusiasm. It is no use asking why it is so. It is so and it is to be accepted as an inevitable fact. The Monday-morning feeling is a solid reality. An adult experiences it as keenly as a child. He reflects in bed, "I wish I had no office

today." It is a routine sentiment for a Monday-morning. The adult may be the sort who loves his work excessively. He may be the sort who cuts short his holiday because he cannot keep away from his desk too long and does not know what to do with his leisure hours. Even he cannot help feeling, "Oh, the wretched Monday again." It is subsequently suppressed, rationalised and sublimated, so that the man moves down the rut smoothly the rest of the week. It is a creditable performance of will, worthy of an adult, but to expect the same application from a child would be unnatural.

Shantha, six years of age, is sent to a convent school across the road, but she has no enthusiasm for studies, nor does she believe there is anything wrong in expressing openly her views on education. She is the happiest person on earth on any Saturday or Sunday. Fortunately for her, in her total self-absorption she never bothers about the coming Monday. The Sunday evening is not ruined for her either by the prospect of Monday or by the thought that the holiday is dripping away. It is just lived through, fully and completely. When someone takes the trouble to remind her, "Go to bed early, tomorrow is Monday, school in the morning," she answers. "Oh, no. We have no school tomorrow," and lives happily in the belief till she is actually pulled out of her bed and out of her dreams next day. As soon as she is up she complains of vague pains and indisposition in the desperate hope that she may return to her bed, but the adult world does not leave her alone. With a frown on her little face she resigns herself to her lot, muttering all the way to school, "I tell you, we have no school today." It is all nature's balance, the child's aversion to school and its elders' zeal for it. No one can object to it. But

what I really find objectionable is the adult's horror at the thought that a child should hate its school. With devoted parents, school is an obsession. They are dismayed at the attitude they see in their child. I know a parent who started a separate establishment twenty miles away from his working place because he wanted to put his child to school. Four-year-old Ramu was to all appearance enthusiastic about the scheme. He liked the change and the new satchel and books bought for him. The first day Ramu went to the school he insisted upon standing all the time in the veranda and watching other children going through their drill and games in the quadrangle. Next day he was persuaded to enter an infant section but he insisted upon his father's coming up and taking his seat beside him in the classroom. They prodded and persuaded and made him go to school every day: each day it was a trial of wit, strength and patience between him and his parents. Thus he attended the school for a few weeks and suddenly one Monday morning announced his unshakable resolve, "I won't go to school." His father was nearly in tears when he reported to me, "I have taken a house on seventy-five rupees a month only for his sake, although it means driving back to my factory twenty miles every day. I wouldn't mind any trouble or expense if only Ramu could be made to like his school. They were very kind there: they even tried to tempt him with chocolates and toffee, but that didn't work. It seems Ramu told his teacher, "My father has ordered me not to eat sweets. They will do me harm." I told the father, "Why do you despair? This is probably a child's happiest stage, when every nook and corner at home looks rich, mysterious and soul-satisfying; no school-room, however well-organised, however psychological or

**w**ell-behaved the teachers might be, could ever compare with the quality of the home. It's the best period of one's life to be home in." In this respect all schools are deficient. Until we adopt the viewpoint of a child and reorganise our educational system, our schools will continue to repel children. They may overcome it, get used to it or resign themselves to it--but love the school, never.

## THE NONMUSICAL MAN

The man cannot understand why so much fuss should be made about music. He can never make out how people could sit in their chairs for hours in a hall gazing on a musician and shaking their heads. In his view the whole thing is a piece of hypocrisy practised by a group of persons who wish to look different.

In a sort of superior way the musical enthusiast feels a pity for this man. Says he to himself, "Ah, this poor fellow is deaf to music. What a lot he misses in life!" And he goes to him with the idea of improving his outlook. He tells the one deaf to music, "You must come and hear so-and-so's music on Sunday," peremptorily, with the air of a physician forcing a draught of quinine.

The other looks scared. The prospect is frightening. He tries to withdraw, but he is compelled to spend the Sunday evening at the music hall. The most unacceptable thing there for him is the mournful silence that he is expected to maintain. He cannot discuss weather or politics with his neighbour. He has to speak in whispers, if at all, and generally conduct himself as if he were in a Presence. His democratic nature does not permit him to tolerate such restrictions. He sits silently fretting in his seat. He feels bored. He tries to count the electric bulbs in the hall. He studies the faces around him. He spots a friend across intervening heads, far off, and feels like shouting, "Hallo, long time since we met!" but he swallows the greeting. He studies a watch on someone's wrist four chairs off. He reads an advertisement board stuck on a pillar, forward and backward, spelling it out letter by

letter. He feels bored with all this activity very soon. He sits back in a mood of profound resignation. He looks at the dais.

The programme is attaining its zenith : the singer and his accompanists are negotiating their way through a tortuous *pallavi*. Our friend notices that the drummer is beating the skin off his palm, the violinist is jabbing the air with his elbow while attempting to saw off the violin in the middle, and the vocalist is uttering a thousand syllables without pausing for breath. A triangular skirmish seems to be developing among the three on the dais. Evidently someone seems to have emerged a victor presently, for the audience which was watching the fray in rapt attention suddenly breaks into thunderous applause. There is a stir in the crowd and a general air of relaxation as the instruments are being tuned and touched up after the terrific battering they suffered a while ago.

Our friend hopes that this is the end of all trouble, but he notices, to his dismay, that it is only a pause. The audience shows no sign of leaving. The musician clears his throat and starts once more, and involves himself in all kinds of complicated, convulsive noise-making. Our friend, who had a brief moment of joy thinking that it was all over, resigns himself to it again, reflecting philosophically, "Everything in this world must end sometime, even music." A most consoling thought.

When the performance ends he leaves the hall with an iron resolution never to go near music again. If he remains an unknown, insignificant man he may exercise his fundamental right of keeping away from music ; but if he becomes a man of consequence he will have to bow to other people's will. He will be invited to attend an eminent artiste's performance. He will be received at the

gate by the organizers of the show. He will be conducted to an honoured seat while an audience of a thousand watch his movement with wonder and respect. The programme will not start until he is well-settled in his seat.

Why they want him to attend this musical function is a question that can never be precisely answered. It may be for a variety of reasons. His presence may lend weight to the occasion ; he may be in a position to cast favours, such as ground for a building, or funds ; there may be a dozen reasons why they want him there, all except that he likes music or knows anything of it. He has to sit through the music fully conscious of his own suffering. He knows that he is imprisoned in his own status. He is not a whit changed inside. His bafflement at the goings-on on the dais is still the same. He still wants to break out into chatter or call up a distant friend. He still feels the same impulse to rise and dash out of the hall at 'supersonic speed' (to quote a young nephew of mine addicted to comics and science fiction), but he simply cannot do such a thing. He cannot afford to hurt anyone. If he gets up, it is feared, the musician may lose his inspiration, it may dishearten the organizers, or throw the audience into a confusion.

Usage makes him a hardened music listener in due course. He can sit through a four-hour performance without turning a hair. Gradually, he wreaks a subconscious vengeance on those who have dragged him into it, by beginning to talk about music in public and in private. He can explain what is good and what is not good in music. He classifies music as classical, heavy, light, bantam, folk, meaningful or meaningless, compares their respective values, and prescribes what is good for whom. This may safely be taken as the point of danger for music as a whole.

## ON HUMOUR

"If you love humour don't talk or write about it," said an eminent *guru* to his disciple. Commendable advice. For, nothing evaporates so swiftly as humour the moment it is examined or explained. Nothing kills it so successfully as analysis and study. I am happy, and feel repeatedly happy at the thought, that humour is not made a subject of study in our universities, which has spared us from the predicament of having Ph. Ds. of humour in our midst. I often speculate what questions a 'theory paper' on humour might have contained if it had been a university examination subject : explain with diagrams the anatomy of laughter, distinguish between chuckling and grinning, trace the relation between gravity and humour, explain the origin of smiles, write short notes on buffoonery, sally, clowning, quip and innuendo. The 'practical paper' might probably have asked the candidate to apply his theory and make an attempt to move at least one of his examiners to emit a loud guffaw.

Humour is still not a public speaker's theme. Had it been one, eminent men presiding over the celebrations of the national humour week might be found exhorting their audience, "Be humorous. We must all strive to wear out grimness wherever we may meet it. Remember grimness is our national enemy number one. Humour lightens the burden of existence, and so let all the good citizens of our country exercise their sense of humour (without detriment to their avocations) during their weekly holidays and all other recognised government holidays."

As our good fortune will have it, no government on earth has bothered to create a ministry of humour, although some have come perilously near it with their zeal for cultural activity. Humour, fortunately, still remains an individual business. Otherwise we should be having experts, bluebooks and statements of annual turnover of jokes emanating from various secretariats.

I have a secret conviction that the posts and telegraphs, more than any other government department, possesses a sly sense of humour, and arranges its affairs in such a manner as to enjoy a quiet chuckle now and then in its contacts with the public. Otherwise how could we explain some of the most bewildering things we see them perform now and then? A bridegroom receives a greeting telegram on his wedding day with just the message, "Number Eight." I have found this mysterious message creating quite a lot of speculation and bewilderment in an otherwise peaceful household just settling down to a restful afternoon after the wedding festivities. "Number Eight" assumes all the sinister quality of a message in code passing between deadly conspirators until one goes to the nearest post office and finds out that it is just the code number of a greeting which calls upon heaven to shower its choicest blessings on the happy couple.

Further, one may notice the presence of small metal discs on the footpaths of any city, stuck at regular intervals. Each disc rears itself up like an angry cobra, a foot above ground : the inscription on the disc explains itself as a 'C.T.D. cable,' placed there by the telegraph or telephone department. Only a dull, humourless mind would protest against it : if you watch closely you will find dozens of feet coming on proudly and then suddenly stumping on

one or the other of the discs : some go limping forward, some step away in surprise, some execute a tango in sheer pain. When the traffic police compel pedestrians to walk on the footpath—ah, that is the time when the C.T.D. discs fulfil their mission without a doubt. This piece of humour is no doubt of the class of circus clowning, but nonetheless it is some kind of humour and let us give the credit where it is due.

Humour is such an individual matter that it would be difficult to generalise about it. I feel distressed whenever I find serious, solemn persons enquiring, "Have we a sense of humour ?" The question will have to be answered by each according to his capacity. But there is also this danger : one might think oneself humorous, but others may not perceive it. There is none so tragic as the man who has delusions in this respect. There is nothing on earth more miserable than the man of anecdotes and constant jokes studiously learnt and cultivated. I know of a public speaker whose most cherished possession is a bulky book containing quotable anecdotes and jokes. He picks up a couple of them at a time, carefully rehearses himself before a mirror and brings them out in the evening. His audience anticipates all his humour and enjoys it unreservedly, although knowing fully that it is all derived from a vast storehouse of quotations. When the lecturer pauses to say, "I am reminded of an anecdote..." the audience laughs in advance. It only proves that the public loves to laugh and that it possesses a better sense of humour than its humorous speaker.

Our cartoonists, humorous writers and columnists are now fully alive, deriving their inspiration from the absurdities and contradictions seen in public life : in the pomposities of self-important men, the elaborate pageantry

surrounding the arrival and departure of a V.I.P., the ridiculous fuss bureaucrats make everywhere, and above all the plight of the modern unknown warrior, who is the middle-class common man, and who is unable to bear all the improvements and benefits that his would-be champions attempt to heap on his head. It would be impossible to survive these if we did not possess a sense of humour : that itself is a proof that we have an abundance of it.

## CENSORIOUS REFLECTIONS

The man with fanatical notions of freedom often dreams of a world in which the word 'censor' will be unknown. He visualises a state of life where he can speak, write and, if he is a showman, exhibit whatever he chooses without fear of a reprimand.

The basis of all censorship is exemplified by the three Chinese monkeys which speak no evil, hear no evil and see no evil. Excellent ideals, no doubt, but who can define evil? In the eyes of a Chinese or any monkey, the fruit merchant who takes a mango garden on lease, and keeps a watch on every fruit and leaf, is an unmitigated evil. "See no evil" in the monkey view may mean, "Let me hope that I shall never set eyes on the fruit merchant." It only shows the hazards of censorship, since there will always be the question : what is evil and who considers it so?

The thought of censorship produces a feeling of extreme uneasiness in most persons, although the censor is as old as humanity. He is the one who attempts to put good sense into other people ; he is the one who knows what is right and how much is right anywhere. One's earliest censor was the teacher or elder, who ordered, "Don't bite your nail." One took away one's thumb immediately, but branded the man as a kill-joy, while the teacher himself felt gratified that he had performed a good action for the day and saved a young man from poisoning himself by his thumbnail. We cannot deny the fact that there can be no meeting ground between the censor and

the censoree (for want of a better word). It has, naturally, to be so, seeing how they work in opposite directions. The very justification for the existence of the censor lies in the assumption that there are deficiencies in the standards and outlook of the censoree and that he needs constant checks and correctives.

I often speculate how it will be if everything that is written has to pass through a board. Imagine a press correspondent despatching a report, the sort of descriptive prose in which a reporter is likely to indulge when he has nothing specific to write about. The passage under scrutiny was, "Every road is a ribbon of red glory, thanks to the punctual Gold Mohur." "Every road is a ribbon," said one member, "I don't think this is an accurate description. Are our roads so narrow as to warrant being described as ribbons? It is an insult to our municipal administration."

"What can our municipal council do? They are dealing with the roads in their jurisdiction as well as they possibly can. But not all the roads belong to the municipality; some are under the authority of the trust board, and some are under the control of the P.W.D.. who are not co-operating with the municipali'y; the roads in their charge may justly be called ribbons...."

"We should not expose all these unsavoury local controversies to public gaze. The situation is delicate, and in the present juncture, it is best to avoid, in print, all reference to roads."

"Moreover, the word ribbon brings up feminine associations and may engender in adolescent minds morbid associations and unhealthy trends of thought. It is our duty to protect young minds from baneful influences...."

"I don't like the words 'Red Glory,' it may make

our allies suspicious and create political embarrassments. The words must be dropped. We shall not object if the journalist gentleman uses the word 'green' in place of 'red'."

"Punctual Gold Mohur?" said another. "It is improper. How can a tree be punctual? Does it mean that trees possess watches and clocks? Such fallacious poesy is not good for our people, who must be encouraged to cultivate a scientific frame of mind. The word 'punctual' must be deleted."

"'Gold Mohur' too is a troublesome word. There is a controversy going on right at this moment whether it should be 'Gul Mohur' or 'Gold Mohur.' It is not right for us to step into this controversial ground."

"Also there is this objection. During the last *Vanamahotsava* the minister ordered us to plant more *pipal* trees. To mention Gold Mohur in spite of it would amount to contempt of *Vanamahotsava*. Better not mention the name of any tree now."

"It is unanimously resolved that the correspondent be asked to re-draft his report in the light of our present discussions and submit it before despatch for our scrutiny and approval."

## RECEPTION AT SIX

Not too long ago the south Indian marriage was a five-day celebration. Festivities went on day and night. It was great fun, the chief entertainers being the newly-wed couple. It was all very well as long as there were child marriages or near-child marriages. As civilization advanced the old type of festivity and fun became unacceptable. The bridal couple were not of the age to face all this tomfoolery. In fact the bridegroom uttered this word a great deal ! He looked askance at every ceremonial and punctuated it with, "Why all this tomfoolery ?" He liked to give an impression of being sophisticated and extremely modern-minded ; and this being the one occasion when people listened to the words emanating from him with every show of respect, he indulged in a rather free commentary on the irrationality of most of the functions going on around him. At this the priest and the elders begged him to put up with their eccentric ways, promising to abbreviate the proceedings as far as possible ; the bridegroom grunted and let them go on. But he drew the line somewhere, and it was where the old type of wedding fun was concerned. He refused outright to go in a procession or amuse his audience in any manner and discouraged giggling children from gathering around him ; but it took away from the whole function all entertainment. People were invited, and when they gathered together some excuse had to be found to keep them on for a while. In order to achieve it there

began to appear at the bottom of the invitation card the legend : 'Reception 6 p.m.'

Now it is a well-established institution, and no one needs to be told what it is all about. In fact the complaint is that it is too well-established. The business part of it is well-set : festoons of lights, array of folding chairs, a musician on the dais ; and tea and cool drinks in one corner, and the couple safely placed on a sofa facing (somehow) both the dais and the auditorium. Invitees arrive at the other end and proceed along in a variety of walking styles, stumbling over chairs, extending their hands toward the bridegroom and bestowing a simpering smile on the bride. To save the visitor all this strain, stage fright and awkwardness, there is now the considerate practice of stationing the couple at the entrance itself, where the visitor may shed his good wishes and possibly presents, and go forward, spot out his friends in that wilderness of folding chairs, and enjoy himself. But at this point it is worth asking : does he meet anyone and get all the expected enjoyment out of the situation ? It is a delicate point. Actually it seems as though one has little to do in the place after one has thrown a smile at the bride and bridegroom. The visitor feels restless and bored and waits for a chance to clear out. At the time he received the invitation he told himself, "I must attend the reception, otherwise so and so will be wild with me," a piece of self-flattery. And so he presents himself under the decorated entrance in due course. The master of ceremonies is of course here. The invitee runs up to him with, "You see, I could not come earlier, what happened was...." He does not complete the sentence, the other is not listening, he is busy bestowing a smile of welcome on the next

visitor and then on the next, as invitees are pouring in in an endless stream.

It is evident that the man, the chief host, has been meeting and has had to be nice to too many persons since the beginning of the day, greeting and welcoming on a mass scale, and it has rather worn him out. Full of sympathy and understanding, *the* invitee, the man who considered himself his particular friend, proceeds to relieve him of his presence and drift to a nearby chair, exchanges some banalities with someone in the next chair, takes to bits some non-descript button hole flower given to him at the gate, smells the back of his hand and notes the scent of sandal paste, and tries to listen to the music. But there is too much babble. He notices the master of ceremonies officially leading a V.I.P. to a chair in the first row, saying something agreeable all along the way. The invitee who has so far engaged himself through his own efforts, suddenly realises the futility of the whole business ; he feels that there is a lack of cohesion somewhere and that he need not have come here at all. If he is a hardened happy-go-lucky type and manages to catch his host's eye again, presently he finds himself in a group drifting towards a dining chamber, but if he is the retiring sort he leaves unobtrusively, snatching the paper bag with cocoanut at the gate, and melts into the night. It is likely that when he meets his friend the host again, many many days later, he may be asked, "How is it that you did not attend the reception at our house the other day ? I remember having sent you an invitation !" And he must have a suitable answer ready, which is neither untruthful nor too offensive.

## IN THE CONFESSIONAL

A writer feels pleased when he meets one of his readers. It is a piece of vanity which is generally forgiven in a writer. People generally think, "Probably it is the only reward the poor worm receives for his work, let us tolerate him." A writer feels gratified when a stranger nods knowingly at the mention of his name, but he soon pays the price for this satisfaction. "Oh, yes," says the stranger, "You are so and so. I have heard a lot about you." If the writer is wise and experienced, he must leave the stranger alone at this point and go away, with the flattering thought that his words are really read. But he probes further and gets the answer. "You write on astronomy, don't you? I have read every word that you have written. I never miss it. Very illuminating, very illuminating," and you, as one who cannot locate even the polestar, realise that you are being mistaken for someone else. You feel like a miserable pretender to a throne, about to be denounced.

There is the reader who displays the utmost enthusiasm on meeting you. He appears so warm and gratified that you think that here, after all, you have met your ideal reader. It has always been your hope that you would come across this ideal person some day, a man who by his very warmth would make you feel that you have been doing some important work, vital for human welfare. But it turns out to be a very short-lived gratification. Disillusionment is actually around the corner. While you are hoping that you are about to have

the pleasure of listening to his reaction to your latest weekly effort, he asks suddenly, "I am proud to meet you, but may I know what you generally write about?" This is an unanswerable question for a writer. You blink for a moment and reply, "Well, mostly fiction . . .," and he answers with a slightly sour face, "Fiction, what sort of fiction?" You feel that you are now with your back to the wall. It was bad to have met this man and encouraged him to talk, now there is no escape; you will have to face it fully, and you mutter a feeble explanation of your outlook on fiction. It is a sort of rambling explanation. All the time you are talking you have a feeling that you are issuing a self-certificate. But mercifully your explanations are cut short by the other's remark, "I never read fiction. I have done with fiction in my adolescence. However, I am glad I have seen you, having heard so much about you, and you know I love to meet writers." And so at the next chance of meeting a reader, you carefully avoid any reference to fiction and when you have to explain what you do, you say, "I write sketches, essays and skits, and light commentaries on contemporary matters," only to rouse the man into saying, "Yes, yes, I am sure I have enjoyed reading your short bits, but why don't you attempt something bigger, say a novel? I am sure you can do it. They say there is a lot of money in novels," and you take the line of least resistance and say, "Thanks for the suggestion. I will try if I can make good there."

There is another type of worry from a reader who overrates you. You have perhaps written a few bits which have touched off your reader's sense of irony or humour, or lampooned or attacked something which happened to be also his pet aversion. It has tickled him so much that

he views you—that most dangerous of reputations to acquire—as a humorist, and when he meets you he is prepared for a hearty laugh. He watches your face and lips anxiously, and you cannot say, "Rather a hot day, isn't it ?" without sending him into paroxysms of laughter. He discovers a sly wit hidden in the statement. He has made up his mind that your very look, your very breath is humorous. He views you as one who performs clowning feats in print. One person went to the extent of saying to me with a lot of patronage, "Continuing to amuse humanity ? Very good !"

There is the type of reader who demands to be told, the moment you are introduced as a writer : "What books have you written ? Give me a list of your works." And you recite the names of your books, the handful of titles you have produced in your decades of writing, only to provoke the other into saying, "Only ten books for so many years ! Can't you write fifty books a year ? I have heard that the late Edgar Wallace used to write two books a week.... Anyway please let me have a complete set of your books ; of course you must send the bill along. I like to encourage Indian authors. I also want our children to read books by modern Indian authors. You promise him your co-operation although you might perhaps do him a service if you told him that you are only an author and not a bookseller, or that the books you have written may not come under the definition of children's books. This man may also display his partiality for facts and figures. He will demand to be told what you were paid for that film story or how much per column you get from such and such paper or what royalty your books fetch. You might probably answer that these facts ought to interest only your income-tax officer, but still you give a

reply, out of politeness, as near the truth as possible. He is frankly disappointed that your sales are not on the million level.

The trouble is that the writer, unlike others who have anything to do with the public, works blindfolded. The stage actor has the chance to see how the public reacts to his performance, the musician has unmistakable response shown to him, the painter can stand aside at his own exhibition and listen to the remarks of his public, but the writer alone has no chance of studying his reader's face or hearing his immediate comment. It is well it is so. It is nature's protective arrangement, I suppose. For it is a well-known axiom that either the writer proves superior to his work or it is the other way round. A meeting of a writer and his reader invariably produces disillusionment, which might as well be avoided. I remember one person who went away in chagrin after coming to see me. He had found in my shelves other people's books, and not my own in golden editions as he had expected. My talk was not scintillating and, above all, I was different from the picture he had of me in his mind.

## BRIDEGROOM BARGAINS

The stock of the bridegroom is rising again. He is again displaying bullish tendencies. It must be a heartening situation for the speculator who has been nursing the stock for a little over two decades. I heard an optimistic father declare that next to investment in housing, whose value can never go below a certain level, the most secure 'gilt-edge' is a son who is unmarried. All that is advantageous in the case of a father with a son naturally turns out to be otherwise for one with a daughter. It may be put down as a safe axiom that the satisfaction felt by the father of a girl is in inverse ratio to that felt by the one with a son. It is naturally so considering that one is a seller and the other a buyer ; and matrimony today remains a seller's market. The father of a girl always prays that matrimony should cease to be any sort of market, and that he should be in a position to say, "My daughter is a priceless possession I have had with me for sixteen years now, I don't know how I am going to be without her. She is invaluable as far as I am concerned and even if you pay me a price of ten lakhs, I would still feel unhappy to part with her, and so I am not selling her; I shall give her away provided you satisfy these two conditions. I must have a confidential report from one of the daughters-in-law of your house, on the outlook and conduct of the elders at home, and I want a psychologist to examine your son and give him a certificate of soundness."

The reality of course is otherwise. The parent who has groomed a son properly, so that he sweeps the honours

in all examinations and has been selected for an administrative career, is the actual dictator of prices today. This market was temporarily dull, or nervous, owing to various political causes, when the Indian republic was newly established, and there was some uncertainty in the services, when the system of recruitment and prospects were undefined. Old values were falling and new ones had not risen. In that brief period trading was cautious. It was an interim period when one heard a bridegroom's bargain agent declare, "Dowry ! Never. We don't want anything. We care for only a good alliance, all else is secondary. We don't want any dowry, but since you are pressing it on us, it is enough if you give us something to meet our actual expenses." This 'something' might mean anything from eight thousand to twelve thousand rupees, most of it supposed to be utilised for defraying the expenses of travel of the large army of relatives and friends accompanying the bridegroom. The bad word *Varadakshinai* was avoided; instead it was called expenses. But now it is a sign of returning confidence that the word is coming into vogue once again. One might note a new directness in demands. The demands today for an eligible bridegroom are beyond the wildest expectations of a former generation. Says the bargainmaster of the prospective prize boy, "I want a cash dowry of forty-five thousand rupees and a motorcar." This is a new trend in bargains, this addition of a vehicle to the cash dowry. If the girl's father thinks that he can palm off a secondhand 8 H.P. or 10 H.P., he will be told presently, "My son has to maintain his status you know, and he must have a car big enough to seat at least six at a time; and you know he is a very sensitive boy, he is very keen on these things : he has an aversion to driving any car manufactured earlier

than 1953." Some may throw in along with their other demands a refrigerator or a radiogram, as an afterthought, explaining, "You know my boy likes ice cream," or "You know he is a great music lover." The poor man, the would-be father-in-law of the boy, is too timid to ask, if the young man was so fond of ices or music, why he should have waited so long to provide himself with these amenities ; but he cannot speak out since, to repeat the position, he is in a seller's market. It almost looks as though the inspiration for these demands is derived from the advertisements of crossword competitions, which sometimes make special seasonal offers of a phenomenal cash prize plus a car plus a refrigerator plus various other inducements. The poor man sadly reflects whether he should hold out so many inducements along with his daughter in order to make her acceptable. The limit was reached I think recently in a case where, following the announcement of the competitive examination results, the hopeful father of a daughter knocked on the door of a successful candidate, whose father opened the door and asked not whether the girl was good looking or accomplished, but whether the man was prepared to buy a 'A' type house in Gandhinagar for himself and his wife, in addition to other items to be mentioned later.

I don't think there is going to be any effective way of abolishing dowry, the victim himself being often an abettor. If it is made illegal, a black market is likely to evolve from the repression. I often think a salestax may be levied on the transactions involving a bridegroom, but this may again be shifted on to an already overburdened father of a girl. So it is just as well that we recognise the institution and work out a table of payments and presents which will provide at a glance what liabilities a

would-be *Sambhandi* is likely to incur : first class in competitive examinations : Rs. 45,000 plus a 20 H.P. motorcar, model not earlier than October 1953 ; medical graduate : Rs. 15,000, Jeep, plus a miniature locomotive of F.R.C.S. studies, plus clinical equipment; engineering graduate : Rs. 15,000, Jeep, plus a miniature locomotive in solid gold; M.Sc. (nuclear physics) : Rs. 15,000 plus five acres of land containing thorium, lignite, etc. ; pilot with 'A' certificate : cash, plus a helicopter for private use ; third class B.A., without any property : Rs. 5,000 plus a bicycle or an autorickshaw (if he *chooses* to make a living out of it). Marriages are, of course, made in heaven, but they are a business in our part of the universe, and why not run it on efficient lines ?

## THE PUBLIC HALL

Sunday is a problem day for any organizer of musical events. First and foremost he must create an engagement, secondly, he must gather an audience, and thirdly, provide four walls and a roof to enclose the gathering. With the exception of a few fortunate ones possessing buildings of their own, most organizations have to struggle for a place under the sun. Every secretary of every association has to keep a perpetual watch for the near-possibilities in regard to accommodation, eliminate them one by one and, by judicious approach and diplomacy, seize the right one for his purpose on a Sunday. The school hall will not be available since a Gita discourse has forestalled music, the town hall may prove too large for the particular function (the secretary's nightmare being a recital addressed to empty chairs), the club hall too small, and the hall of the library-without-books is not available since the authorities concerned prefer to keep its door locked.

The problem of the public hall is a real one in these days when culture has become a regular week-end activity. Most of this activity is at present being carried on through a variety of makeshift arrangements. Makeshift seems capable of going to any extent. I once attended a music performance in a spacious godown. The recital was by an eminent artiste, the public was responsive, and the performance itself was of the finest standard. There was no reason why the engagement should not have gone on without a hitch, but it couldn't. One or the other among the audience was constantly coughing or sneezing, and such

activities have a tendency to spread; presently the singer herself had to struggle against a fit of coughing. The reason was not far to seek. There were bags of chillies piled in a corner, cunningly camouflaged with bamboo matting, the chillies, being a good variety, sent forth their effluvia even from their place of concealment. The floor was covered with some jute fabric, perhaps used as packing material. The audience sat on it cheerfully enough as on a carpet, but the fabric held in its weaves thousands of minute antlike insects, which, though rendered harmless through D.D.T. spraying as the organizer was good enough to explain, kept a section of the audience in a state of mild anxiety and restlessness. The serenity and composure necessary for the fullest enjoyment of classical music could not be mustered; and then there was the biggest embarrassment of all caused by a railway engine walking right into the programme: we hadn't noticed it at first but the farthest end of the hall opened on a small railway track. The engine kept arriving and departing, dragging a couple of wagons, with all its clanging and whistling. The singer and the accompanying players remained in a state of suspended animation every time it arrived since the *sruthi* of the engine, to say the least, was inappropriate. Everyone blamed the secretary for it. He explained, "How could I help it? The man who lent us this hall cannot be expected to sacrifice his business for our sake; he could get the wagons into his siding only today!" The musician admitted, "I felt I was singing on the Central Station platform, a rather novel experience!"

There is another *sabha* in which even the best of performances has to be heard without the musician being seen. The performance is generally held in the front hall of some private residence and gets filled with the first fifty

arriving, all the rest hang about the veranda and try to make the best of it, occasionally peeping between or over the shoulders of those crowding at the doorway and the windows, which generally afford a side view of the musician and a back view of one of the accompanists. Those that manage to have a seat inside are hardly to be envied : they sit in a tight pack with their limbs crushed and folded up; those in the front row sit practically flattened against the dais with the violinist's bow constantly threatening to gouge out their eyes. As one sits here attempting to lose oneself in the relish of classical flights, one's mind is racked with a variety of background thoughts ; one wishes that one were made of rubber so as to take the squeeze on all sides casually; one wishes one could unscrew one's limbs at the knee and put them away, and also that one's neighbours would let one lean back and recline on them without making any fuss about it.

It speaks for the hardihood of our aesthetes as well as the art that our music has survived all this trial; but it cannot be denied that it cannot go on in this manner for ever. Our music deserves to be housed properly in every corner of the country. Every secretary has his pet dream of raising a building fund, creating a hall to accommodate two thousand at a time, with enough funds at his disposal not to have to eke out the revenue with advertisement charges for hanging on pillars, placards announcing the virtues of various brands of snuff or asafoetida, with enough acoustics to present the human voice without an amplifier, and above all with enough public support to see the hall full every Sunday.

## THE FOND PARENT

"My boy is so clever, so sensitive, unique in every respect," begins the fond parent, and no one minds murmuring some sort of agreement with this view as long as it does not involve him in doing anything about it. It gives the fond parent the feeling that a hundred percent of the population venerates his son. Every time he hears a good word about his son he feels pleased that he has found yet another wise man who agrees with him. He can never have too much of such gratifying moments. He can hear over and over again the same laudation, for he has a feeling that the poor dear has not had his desert in life. It is a chronic feeling.

There is nothing wrong perhaps in being a fond parent. One has as good a right to be a fond parent as anything else in life ; but the trouble is that he gradually develops an anxiety that there should be sufficient recognition and reward for all the equipment and qualities of his dear one. Unfortunately the outside world is callous and may show little concurrence in action.

When a child shows any sharpness of wit or wisdom it is usual for family friends to suggest that the fellow must be sent up for competitive examinations in due course, with the additional remark, "When all kinds of worthless fellows make the attempt, it should be child's play for your boy, but you will have to prepare him for it from this minute." This advice falls pleasantly on the ears of a fond parent. He begins to watch his son's education with extra interest. He watches not only his

son's marks but also the marks of all those who sit near him. He feels pleased when a neighbour's son gets less than his son and distressed when he scores higher marks. The season of examinations is one of tension for him. He lives over again all the anxiety that he himself underwent in his boyhood. He escorts his son to the door of the examination hall, and the moment he comes out snatches the question paper from his hand, goes through it, and cross-examines him in order to gauge how much he is going to get and whether he will excel others. Examiners, however, have a tendency to go their own way, without bothering about the feelings of fond parents. The fond parent's view may be endorsed or the examiners may differ in their judgment. If they differ, the man may feel shocked at first but gradually gets over it and begins to take a realistic view of things. It is likely that he may come to the position of being able to remark in due course, "I thought the fellow would do such and such, but see what he has turned out to be ! If only he had applied himself to the task a little more earnestly, he could have given a beating to all the rest. He is not wanting in intelligence, but you see . . ." The greater danger is when the man's faith remains unshaken even after the results are plainly out. The son can do no wrong ; it is the world that is wrongheaded. The fond parent will go on bewailing the chicanery and the unsuspected villainies that people practise. He loses faith in the system itself. "Something is wrong with our educational system, I tell you. It is not what it used to be. Nowadays all kinds of considerations and pressures are brought in over even small matters. You know what I mean !" He is racked with the feeling that he and his dear one are condemned to live in a crafty and hostile world.

Next to examinations, the fond parent's favourite subject is music. Music, theoretically speaking, is a great unifying factor in life, but it has a tendency to disrupt human relationship. Come to think of it, I doubt if there could be such a thing as perfectly objective music. When a fond father says, "Do you know how well my daughter sings?" it often shows more affection than judgment. If you dared to say so, after sampling the talent, you would be put down as one without grace, fairness or knowledge. You might even be subject to some amount of screening by the fond parent in order that your hollowness might be exposed. You would be asked, "What peculiarities did you observe in her *tala*? What was the *raga* that she elaborated twenty minutes ago? Could you explain what *madhyama* she adopted in the ascending scale or what *daivata* in the descent?" There is another type of fond parent who has no knowledge of music, but who will not hesitate, in his very innocence, to buttonhole the most dreaded virtuoso and say, "You must listen to my son's music and tell me what you think of it. Personally I don't know anything about music, but people say that my son is a genius. Untaught by anyone, he plays any musical instrument. He reproduces immediately any tune he hears on any instrument near at hand. He wants me to buy him a *vina* or violin or some such thing. He plays all the film tunes. Please come to my house and listen. I want you to guide him." Or the fond parent's refrain may be: "Do you know what wonderful stories my son writes?" I don't know where he learnt to draw! He does such funny caricatures! Boy, bring your album. He has such a fine sense of humour!" "Nobody taught this little one dancing but you know how expertly she dances! Last year she danced in her school and people

said we must arrange a public performance next. Come on, little one, won't you show this gentleman a little of your dancing? Come on, you must not be shy...."

The fond parent lives in a world of his own. He has abundant faith, hope and charity in him, but most (if not all) of it is reserved for his favourite child. It is not that he is an enemy of mankind, but he is just indifferent. He is prepared to let others live and flourish provided that it does not in any way reduce the glory of his favourite child. The careerist may say, "All the world owes me a living." Modifying it, the fond parent might well declare, "All the world owes my child a testimonial."

## TWO-WAY DEMOCRACY

Democracy is a dull subject, and I shall not be surprised if the idiom soon comes into existence, "dull as democracy." I am not, however, to be taken to be a champion of autocracy, oligarchy or anarchy. If I say that democracy is dull, it is from the point of view of writing, whatever it may be in other respects. I view it purely as a theme for a writer. You can hardly find any subject less interesting. Personally I skip even the greatest masterpiece if I find the expression democracy occurring more than twice on a page.

It must have been a fairly exciting subject in those days when it was first thought of; for instance, when Mill wrote on liberty. Its novelty has worn out, just as we don't pay much attention to the fact that water consists of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, although at the time it was discovered it must have been a topic of conversation in polite company. "Well, did you hear, water has been analysed and found to contain oxygen and hydrogen!" with the doubting type always there to remark, "Personally I can't accept it, there must be some fraud somewhere."

Democracy has become dull because it has begun to move on set lines. Election date, campaigning, canvassing, polling, results, a seat in an assembly, hall, speechifying and division, for the next two, three or  $n$  years till the time comes to renew the personalities in the hall, like renewing the plants in the pots on the verandah. This is a well-worn line of movement and the subject has lost its

novelty. The spurt of life that democracy attains during the heat of an election soon subsides, and you will have to wait for three or five years before you get a chance again of enjoying the season. The eve of election is most interesting because everyone enjoys a visit from a distinguished would-be representative, who politely enquires how things are and then confides : "I am entirely depending upon friends and well-wishers like you to help me through this; you must not disappoint me." You never thought this man was ever so helpless or could lean on you so much. The common man gets his chance to experience the luxury of this feeling only once in a while. It is hardly adequate. If I were asked to suggest a scheme for brightening up democracy, I should propose the introduction of a two-way voting system. All the discontent and unsatisfactory nature of modern public life is due to the fact that every election is a one-way business now. You elect someone to some public body and there 'he matter ends. It is not enough. You must have an equal privilege of taking him out ; those who put in must also have the power to take out. This may be called de-election. This proposal merits serious consideration. Voting for someone should not be in the nature of dropping a coin in one of those collection boxes which cannot be opened under any circumstance. Once the coin is in, it is as good as lost to you. It will keep the air lively when democrats evolve the technique of de-election. It will keep the candidates wondering what their constituents will be up to the next minute. It should be quite feasible for a constituency to say, "We notice you have not been quite up to the mark, and we regret we cannot have you in such and such a body any longer. Will you kindly come out of it ?" I leave it to experts to devise the machinery for it. I have

no doubt that eventually they will evolve a method, just as they have evolved the ballot box and adult franchise. But as a tentative suggestion I wonder how the following will work : Suppose the voting paper of the individual is traceable (in keeping with secrecy) when necessary, and the adult sends in a requisition saying : "Dear sir, I have very good reason to regret that I ever voted for so-and-so. My voting paper bears such and such mark. I hereby withdraw my support in pursuance of our decision to de-elect the honourable member. I want my vote back." The candidate's tenure in his seat will depend on how many of the original votes are left in the box at the end of the de-electing activity.

## THE SCOUT

I remember I was very proud of being a scout. I spent several sleepless nights revelling in visions of myself in a scout uniform : khaki shorts and shirt, green turban (those were still days of turban), colourful shoulder straps and the mighty staff in hand. There was really no need for me to spend my time in mere dream but for the fact that my scout teacher seemed to have told my people that they could take their own time to provide me with a uniform. I don't know why he said it, but probably he felt that my novitiation was incomplete ; he must have had a better measure of my stage and worthiness than I. I thought no end of my accomplishments, although now looking back, any competence I exhibited must have been only in regard to the holding of the staff, and in giving the scout salute. But this was obviously not enough : If I had been asked : "What is the fourth law of scouting ?" I am sure I should have felt flabbergasted. Or, "What are the three promises ?" I was sure to bungle because the easiest thing that came to my head was, "On my honour I promise to do my best for God, *crown* and country." But we belonged to an association which had decided to drop the *crown* in their promise, deftly substituting something else, perhaps *truth*, in its place; but I always stumbled on to *crown*, under the strong influence of a friend from another troop, which followed the orthodox line. In addition to my own handicaps another important reason why I could not have the uniform was that my people at home believed that good khaki could not be

easily obtained except by using someone's influence. Their line of thought was : "I know someone who knows someone who alone can get the best khaki at the cheapest price." This meant agonizing trips for me, up and down, and waiting on the arrivals, departures and moods of a contact man who, beside this business of finding me the best khaki on the easiest of terms, had plenty of other things to do for himself, and so could not view or remember his promises with the single-mindedness I expected of him. But all this meant only delay and not actual frustration.

Eventually the khaki pieces arrived, to be followed by countless journeys on my part to the tailor, who was probably unused to the business of stitching shorts and the scout shirt, with so many pockets and straps and flaps; finally he did produce something approximating our design; it turned out to be a little prolonged here and a little curtailed there, but by judicious tucking-in, slicing-off and re-stitching, he gave me something that might have seemed a little ill-made to impartial eyes, but enough to fill my heart with pride and satisfaction when I viewed myself in a mirror; khaki, turban and streamers at the shoulder. The picture that the mirror gave me was so imposing and self-inspiring that I had no doubt I was one of the pillars of the nation. I would give anything to feel that again now with such genuineness and intensity. I had a feeling that I had ceased to be just a boy hanging around the fringes of the world of elders, but someone of consequence. I belonged to a very vital group. We stood at attention, turned right and left, saluted each other and uttered patrol calls. When we marched in the streets in a file we had a feeling that we were the objects of envious watching by the whole town. We had certain esoteric secret training and abilities; by glancing at the marks on

the ground we could say where a companion had gone or where a buried treasure could be located. We knew what to do if someone was drowning, how to light a fire in a storm with a single match stick (I never passed this test), how to tie a reef knot, the mysterious purposes of sheep shank or clove hitch, how to bandage a cracked skull. All this knowledge filled us with the pride of accomplishment and performance. And how anxious we were to place our knowledge and training at anybody's disposal, always waiting to be asked to regulate crowds, help people out or watch over something. It was incumbent upon a scout to record at least one good turn a day in his diary. It was not at all as easy as it might sound. I can recollect the desperation some days when the world seemed to be so perfectly organized that one looking about to perform a good turn hardly got a chance. It was harrowing to feel that perhaps the page would have to be left blank for the day. Driven to desperation, one did all sorts of things. If one could somehow salvage my good-turn diary of years ago one would find therein such profound entries as "Chased away a big dog when it came to bite a small dog," or "Saw the old lady in the fourth house suffering from stomach ache, ran to the opposite shop and fetched a bottle of soda water," and "Guided a stranger to the toddy shop."

Of course there were badges and decorations for special achievements, but they were not the chief source of inspiration for the performance of shining deeds. The important thing was finding an occasion for performing a good deed; all else was secondary.

## THE AUTO PUNDIT

The auto pundit is a hundred-percent twentieth century product. He is one who possesses versatility combined with sensitiveness in all matters pertaining to automobiles. Looking at this definition in cold spelling, I find that it conveys very little. It sounds too mechanical and lifeless, whereas the auto pundit's very special quality is that he can breathe life into a mechanism. He is like a magician who picks up a lifeless twig, utters an incantation over it, and makes it flourish and wave in the air. To an ordinary person an automobile is just an assemblage of wheels, cogs, valves and tubes, but to the auto pundit all these are there, but they also mean something more, something that transcends the sum total of all the parts, just as a human personality is something more than the sum total of limbs, bones and sinews.

Others may see in an automobile only an internal combustion engine turning the wheels, taking people where they wish to go and stopping where they want to stop : but to an auto pundit the very fact of its being able to carry people about is perhaps the least important of its aspects. The auto pundit looks for other values in a mo'or-car. For him it is a living organism which is capable of self-expression. It expresses itself through a delicate idiom of its own. You must see the expression on his face when an engine is started. He listens to its sound with all his being. His ears listen, his eyes watch, his nostrils quiver, his nerves become taut and ready to respond to the slightest vibration. Every part of his body, every sensory

means of perception has its use for him at this moment. Of course the most important part of his understanding is through sound : he is a *nadhopasaka*, if I may borrow this expression for a moment from music critics. He is as much entitled as anyone else to be called a *nadhopasaka*; the significance of *nadha* is deeply ingrained in him: he is a complete devotee at the altar of sound. He puts his powers of hearing to the greatest use that could ever be thought of. When he listens to a sound in a car he listens first if its *sruthi* is perfect, and nothing gives him greater joy than the music of a perfectly attuned car. The co-ordinated hum of a perfectly attuned automobile engine is as the heavenly music a god hears when the stars and planets move in their orbits without colliding or overtaking each other: the appreciative nod of a god under such circumstances would be similar to the nod of our friend when he hears a perfectly timed symphony of valves and plugs emanating from under the hood of a motorcar. On the other hand, when it produces some unseemly sound, a scowl darkens his face, as he asks grimly, "Why ? Why ? When did you look at the plugs ? Or could it be—?" It may be a minute particle of dust visible only under a microscope that disturbs the carburettor's function, but he will know no rest till he tracks it and puts it out.

When an unknown car is brought to his presence, he will open the door of the driving seat, take his seat there and lose himself in contemplation, and then his fingers push and tug and shake up every lever and button; a few minutes of this and already he has learnt the history of this case. What he now needs is only a confirmation. He puts the car in motion. It is not necessary for him to travel more than a few yards ; he wheels around and gets down with an air of finality. Now he is in a position

to give his verdict ; a transaction of a few thousand rupees may hang on it ; before saying anything, just to make sure, he goes round the car once, or he may even go down on his knees before it or crawl under it. ("We must not mind circumambulating and having to prostrate before this god," he said once.) When he emerges from all this, the anxious question is fired at him, "Well, what do you think?"

"Not bad, but compression is weak. There is a little amount of misfiring too. And there is a pull to the right at the steering.... Apart from this I see nothing wrong. . . ."

He believes that a motorcar can suffer all the ills that affect human beings. An automobile is prone to develop angina pectoris, gastric ulcers, asthmatic wheezing, spleen englargement, nervous prostration and even symptoms of lunacy. He has set it as his mission in life to watch for these symptoms, trace out the trouble and prescribe the remedy. His aim in life is to see motorcars in blooming health and good sense peopling our roads.

## GARDENING WITHOUT TEARS

A little gardening goes a long way, and I view with apprehension the recent outburst of horticulturism 'hat is evident everywhere. What one needs is not a mere garden, but a garden which leaves one in peace. If someone will draw a blueprint for gardening without tears I shall be the first to support it. The gardening enthusiast is the most anxiety-ridden person on earth. He is constantly racked with the feeling that he has to contend against evil forces all his life. He visualizes himself as a victim of all the malicious forces in the universe which are ever ready to frustrate his dream, coming to him in the shape of straying chickens from the neighbourhood looking for seeds, seedlings or sprouts; or a laughing child dancing on a patch of soil cultivated with blood, sweat and tears, or just a dignified visitor whose dignity would be injured if told not to let his finger play mischief with the foliage on the way. Every fervent garden-maker becomes a cranky neurasthenic full to the brim with complexes. There is something in gardening which affects what may be called the norm of human temperament.

There are at least two gardens within every compound -- the seen and the unseen. What a visitor sees in the first round is only a small portion of what the proud gardener actually has in view. The lover of plants lives in a sort of fourth-dimensional plane. Many things that you as a visitor will not notice are already there : that plot of turned-up earth is just a forest of roses, that small twig sticking out a green shoot a tenth of an inch long is not

actually a stick but *plumeria*, *poinciana* or *spathodia*, rare and noble trees which have transformed the landscape. Their very names possess magic and poetry. There is much to commend in the use of botanical names, which apart from other things act as passwords among the community of plant-lovers, shutting out the Philistine who cannot distinguish between cacti and cannae : and which also keep alive in our midst Latin, probably the only language which has not spread widely enough in our country to create a problem.

There are at least as many types of gardens as there are temperaments. Our tradition is to start a piece of gardening, whatever may be the size of the area, with a cocoanut seedling on an auspicious day, and follow it up with other things. The cocoanut is for posterity, hibiscus and jasmine for the gods in the *puja* room, vegetable for the kitchen, and lastly come those that afford merely visual pleasure. It is in contrast to the quick gardening that, for example, a foreign visitor taking a house for a few months would plan : pansies, asters, phlox and zinnia, and this and that, which come up within a few weeks, brightly wave their multi-coloured stalks, and as swiftly wither away without a trace. I once observed an American who took a house for a few months ; he hustled the earth with phosphate, sulphate and compost, and grew lettuce for salad, maize(corn on cob) for snack, and cut flowers for table decoration, and gave an impression of creating a garden overnight, but it was a strictly utility garden that would not outlast the lease. I observed that there was no semblance of a garden left a week after he vacated the house.

A plant, no doubt, can be a man's best friend : silent, unobtrusive and (more or less) responsive. The great

thing about plants is that they don't move or make noise, the two great evils that beset us in this world of ours. We are all the time so much battered by noise and movement that it ought to prove a tonic for us to watch things that don't move or talk. But we must first examine ourselves and ask, "Are we worthy of this great company?" Unless one makes sure of it, one is likely to suffer (and also cause suffering) by contact with plants. Who is the happy gardener? It is he that hath the hope and resignation of a gambler, the nerves of a circus acrobat, the unfading wonderment of a growing child, the detachment of a seer and, above all, the forbearance of the eldest of the *Pandavas*.

## PRIVATE FACES

It is a well-known condition of modern times that any man who is a public figure has to live two lives : one for public view and the other something not so public; the trouble is that this arrangement is not always successful. It is as though those who were supposed to be looking at the front plate-glass window were all the time looking for a chink through which they might get a view of the backyard. Otherwise there is no reason for the interest and curiosity that people display in the private life of a public man. While he is all the time striving to convey a particular impression of himself, the public is all the time consumed with curiosity as to what he is and what he looks like off stage. In effect the public seems to say, "Well, we have seen you with paint and costume and your set declamation, but we feel that it cannot be the real you. We are interested in watching your show to a reasonable extent, no doubt, but what we really want to know is how you spend your time at home, how you take out your family for shopping, what you do with that naughty son of yours and so on; in short our interest is in seeing you as a normal human being." Out of this curiosity a particular kind of journalistic feature has in recent times developed, presenting a personal angle on eminent men through photographs and interviews. It is nice to see the great man at home in his dressing gown or *dhoti* and shirt. He is mounted on the hall sofa, with his children, grandchildren or little nephews around him, happily looking at their picture books. I once asked a

great man how he actually enjoyed the company of children, for the caption under the picture said, "So-and-so generally relaxes in the company of the little children at home, whenever he wishes to escape the stress of public life." He replied, "It is just as true as the picture of my playing cricket with my little nephews which you see there. To be frank, I loathe cricket, but the photographer made me go through it as a sort of *mamul*. And secondly, when I wish to forget the stress of public life, you may rest assured that I won't invite the stress of life with children. I love children no doubt, no one can help it, but I don't seek them unless I am sure that my nerves can stand their noisy, restless company. I like to leave them alone if they leave me alone...." Many other things that the great man does, such as his interest in plants, his taking a thoughtful walk in his garden at five a.m., and his meticulous attention to correspondence, are all routine things that a great man is expected to do in his private life. The whole thing has become more or less standardised. It is almost implied that unless a great man shows an interest in cricket or reads nursery rhymes or looks sentimentally at the flowers in his garden, he will lose the esteem that the public has for him.

In a recent book I came across an interesting grouping of public men : cabinet ministers, successful authors, prize fighters, cinema actors and bishops. Each category has a public front to maintain and at the same time satisfy public curiosity in regard to its unseen life. The public is always curious to know if the successful author gets his inspiration before or after writing his piece, whether he writes before or after lunch, whether he writes on a long sheet of paper or on the back of an envelope, whether he cares for his wife and children or prefers to live a Bohemian life.

mian life and, above all, what he earns out of his work—all of which is entirely irrelevant to an understanding of his writing; but somehow the public seeks these bits of information, and has to be answered in the most cordial manner. So also with the politician; the public likes to know if his domestic life is also full of challenge, harangue or table-thumping; and in the case of a prize fighter, I suppose, if his wife ever thinks it safe to ask him to hold the baby. Out of all this a convention has developed of what we may broadly call public relations. Although the ideal is to have a single show for private and public view (a state attained by saints alone), ordinarily, in the nature of things, it seems an impossibility. It is very well illustrated by Oliver Wendell Homes in one of his Table Talks. ". . . there are at least six personalities distinctly to be recognized as taking part in that dialogue between John and Thomas.

Three Johns :

1. The real John; known only to his Maker.
2. John's ideal John ; never the real one and often very unlike him.
3. Thomas' ideal John; never the real John, nor John's John, but often very unlike either.

Three Thomases :

1. The real Thomas.
2. Thomas' ideal Thomas.
3. John's ideal Thomas.

Only one of the three Johns is taxed; only one can be weighed on a platform balance; but the other two are just as important in the conversation."

## COFFEE WORRIES

For a south Indian, of all worries the least tolerable is coffee worry. Coffee worry may be defined as all unhappy speculation around the subject of coffee, as a habit, its supplies, its price, its quality, its morality, ethics, economics and so on. For a coffee addict (he does not like to be called an addict, the word has a disparaging sense, he feels that we might as well call each other milk addicts or food addicts or air addicts), the most painful experience is to hear a tea-drinker or a cocoa-drinker or a purist who drinks only water hold forth on the evils of drinking coffee. He views it as an attack on his liberty of thought and action. Even a misquoted Parliament report (as it recently happened) on the coffee policy of the government can produce in him the gravest disturbance, temporarily though.

It is not right to call it a habit. The word habit like the word addict has a disparaging sense. One might call smoking a habit, one might call almost everything else a habit, but not coffee. It is not a habit; it is a stabilising force in human existence, achieved through a long evolutionary process. The good coffee, brown and fragrant, is not a product achieved in a day. It is something attained after laborious trials and errors. At the beginning, people must have attempted to draw decoction from the raw seed itself or tried to chew it; and then they learnt to fry it, and in the first instance, nearly converted it into charcoal. Now people have developed a sixth sense, and know exactly when the seed should be taken out of the frying pan and

ground, and how finely or roughly it must be ground. Nothing pleases a normal man of South India more than the remark, "Oh, the coffee in his house is excellent. You cannot get the like of it anywhere else in the world." Conversely no one likes to hear that his coffee is bad, although the truth may be that the powder he has used is adul'ered, the strainer has let in all the powder, and there is every indication that they have (a horrible thing to do) added jaggery to the decoction. In this instance the thing to appreciate is not the coffee itself but the spirit behind it. South India has attained world renown for its coffee and every South Indian jealously guards this reputation.

Coffee forms nearly thirty percent of any normal family budget. The south Indian does not mind this sacrifice. He may beg or run into debt for the sake of coffee, but he cannot feel that he has acquitted himself in his worldly existence properly unless he is able to provide his dependents with two doses of coffee a day and also ask any visitor who may drop in, "Will you have coffee ?" without fear at heart. This is the basic minimum for a happy and satisfied existence. Here and there we may see households where the practice is more elaborately organized, and where coffee has to be available all hours of day or night; there are persons who call for a cup of coffee before starting a fresh sentence while writing or conversing. Perhaps all this may be 'oo much. These are likely to come under the category of addicts, but their constant demand is understandable. No man asks for a fresh cup of coffee without criticising the previous one. "It was not quite hot.... It seemed to have too much sugar. Let me see how this is...." It is only a continuous search for perfection, and let no one spoil it by giving it a bad name. Anyway, it

cannot be called an addiction since anything that takes on that name brings forth evil results. Coffee has produced no bad result. It is supposed to spoil sleep, but there is a considerably growing school of thought that it is very good for insomnia. For one person who may say that coffee keeps him awake there are now at least three to declare that they can have a restful night only when they have taken a cup before retiring. All moralising against coffee has misfired in this part of the country. "Coffee is a deadly poison, you are gradually destroying your system with it etc., etc.," declares some purist. He may lecture from a public platform or on a street corner but people will listen to him with only a pitying tolerance, with an air of saying. "Poor fellow, you don't know what you are talking about, you don't know what you are missing. You will still live and learn." In course of time this prophecy is fulfilled. Many a man who came to scoff remained to pray. Coffee has many conquests : saints, philosophers, thinkers and artists, who can never leave the bed unless they learn that coffee is ready, but not the least of its conquerors is among those who came to wage a war on it.

## LOOKING ONE'S AGE

Honestly speaking, one is never satisfied with one's own photograph, the feeling always being that it could have been better. One puts the blame on the photographer, light, some unexpected distraction that brought on that stunned expression, and so forth.

Photographers advise their subjects to look pleasant, casual or unconcerned. But nothing helps. Among facial expressions a smile is the most risky one to adopt. "I never realised how ghastly I look till I saw that snapshot of mine taken when I was supposed to be smiling," confessed a friend to me recently. "One feels sympathy for a world that has to go on looking on this face." The only consolation in this is that it is mutual and universal. The feeling is one of uneasiness in any case, whether one thinks that one's photograph might have been better or worse. No photograph can be said to be perfect : it always overstates or understates one's personality. One's thoughts are either, "I wish I deserved the compliment the photographer has paid me!" on "What a bother ! This man has caught me while I am simpering like a moron." I have met very few persons who have the hardihood to hang portraits of themselves in their studies or at the entrance to their homes.

A photographic impression is perhaps the most fleeting of impressions. A photograph caught in a fraction of a second is valid only for that fraction of a second. Even as the spool is being wound the personality changes. In this sense a mirror can hardly confirm what a camera

presents. I do not refer here to the young person who gets into the habit of deep contemplation of his or her own features with due appreciation of the reflected image, but of a normal person on whom Nature has started her operations unmistakably.

One goes on living in a fool's paradise, visualizing oneself as one used to be, never acquiring a sense of reality, always blaming the photographer or the mirror for anything that may seem uncomplimentary. If others do not give out the actual state of affairs, it might be because they are considerate or have not noticed the changes. This state continues until one day someone, whom one has not seen for a long time, turns up, and exclaims, "I say ! It took me time to recognise you. I thought it was someone else, possibly your uncle." "Why ? Why ?"

"Oh, you have . . ." he hesitates, "you used to be so slim and your hair probably was not so grey." However indifferent one might be, there comes a time in everyone's life when one hears it for the first time. Depending upon the type of person to whom it is addressed, it comes as a shock or a pleasant surprise. It is not everyone who is likely to feel depressed at the thought that he has lost his original youthful appearance. It is only an abnormal person who will cling to a vision of himself as he was years before. Most persons, after they get over the initial surprise, will settle down and accept the position with a good deal of cheer. That is how Nature has intended it to be taken. Within reasonable limits one ought to look one's years. There is a certain propriety about it : that girth is inevitable at that age or that degree of greyness. To be rosy-cheeked, curly-headed and slim at fifty ! You have only to think of this picture to realise how incongruous it could be. It would be in the nature of an insult

to the age, as unacceptable as at attaining the rotundity and baldness of middle age at eighteen. Nature seems to have arranged it all with great forethought. That receding forehead, that greyness at the temple, that filled-in shape are all divinely ordained, and succeed in producing a wonderful picture of serenity and wisdom, and lend weight to the personality. I have come across persons who are bothered by their youthful appearance : that shock of youthful hair, that smooth chin, that unwanted slimness are greatly distressing, especially when the man has to keep up an appearance of authority or pugnacity in order to get some work going. He attempts to remedy the deficiency by nurturing fierce whiskers or by wearing heavy black-rimmed glasses, masks which are expected to overawe an onlooker.

It is good to acquire the appearance that one's age warrants and to know how one strikes others, without any feeling of shock or surprise. This thesis, however, is intended mainly for men and not for women, about whose psychological reaction in these matters I dare not speculate.

## THE GREAT BASKET

In a new order of things I hope the wastepaper basket will receive the recognition and status that it deserves. It is not just a receptacle that you keep under your table for flinging unwanted papers in. Unwantedness, in any case, is a relative term. The urgent paper of today becomes the unwanted one of tomorrow. If a new symbol is needed to indicate Time it should be neither the hour-glass with falling sand nor the hands of a clock, but a wide-girthed wastepaper basket into which all papers vanish and attain a final equality. This tax notice, that cinema folder, that reminder of an old bill, even letters from friends or foes whose contents have been read and digested, and invitation cards so laboriously prepared and printed, where do they end?

I have discovered a most practical way of dealing with unnecessary correspondence. I suffer from the privilege of receiving letters from strangers, most of whom desire to tell me how to write or what to write about. I go through them with reverential care, but I am never able to acknowledge them. It is not because I am not able to appreciate the brilliance of the advice or the spirit in which it is given, but, having to write for a living, it is impossible to engage oneself in the same activity at the end of a day's labour. If a writer does not always display the courtesy of acknowledging a letter it must be put down to nothing worse than psychological difficulties of his profession. And so what happens? I read the letter, send up a silent thanks to the writer and

then gently toss it under the table. I know where it will fall. By long practice I know exactly how far a gentle fling will carry a piece of paper. I don't have to look a second time. It is rarely that I overshoot or undershoot and find the letter or paper lying under the table. When that happens it means that the missile must be an abnormal one, of an unusual density or volume, such a questionnaire form or a catalogue. It may seem unjust that this should happen to the most carefully composed forms and lists, but no one who is reasonable can ever object to this disposal. What else can one do with them? It is with reluctance and regret that I consign such papers to the basket, constantly asking myself what else could I do about them? If I keep them in sight on my table they will go on bothering my conscience. I don't wish to go through existence with a gnawing conscience all the time. By putting that letter out of sight I remove one possible strain on my conscience. I make the wastepaper basket my conscience-keeper. I never crumple a letter while slipping it into the basket. I leave it whole with all its postmark intact on its envelope. I never have my basket cleared except once in a while. This helps me take a second look at my correspondence when occasion calls for it. I remember quite a few occasions when I have pulled out a letter from the basket and written a reply on second thoughts.

Apart from other considerations there is the question of space. You may have the largest study and the most capacious table but yet day by day, there is bound to be gradual and steady encroachment on all the available space, and a time may come when (to quote Shaw), "the dead may crowd the living out of this earth." The word dead must not be resented by anyone. Keep any letter for a

week and it becomes dead, and then the only thing to do with it is to put it out of sight and no one is the worse for it. When examined after a week what seemed pressing and inescapable seems just cold and inconsequential. Only government offices enjoy the unique privilege of keeping in ponderous files what had better be entombed in the great basket. Their fear is that all sorts of papers may be necessary for some reference at some future date. My view is that this world would be a better place to live in if there were fewer references available on any question. No question is valued on its own present worth but in relation to a deadweight of its past.

I feel that a little more liberal use of the W.P.B. will also solve all accommodation problems in this world. Everywhere there is a cry for more accommodation—not for human beings alone but for papers and files. It is just here that the W.P.B. can help humanity.

The basket is an equally good place for sudden and voluminous literary effusion. There is a cold impersonality about its reception of literary matter which always appeals to me. I have sometimes found it necessary to consign to it several thousand words of a new novel representing weeks of hard work, and I have felt the better for it. When one can bring oneself to the point of doing it, one feels light and free and able to resume an obliterated chapter with a better perspective.

Apart from its association with much paper, the great basket is an article worth possessing for its own sake. It is the shapeliest article ever made by human fingers. It has symmetry, poise, accessibility and balance, and it certainly deserves a better place than the dark regions under a desk.

## ON KNOWLEDGE

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing, as everyone knows ; but so also is too much knowledge and all unnecessary knowledge. One of our gravest omissions today is that we have not decided how much to know ; we have not yet developed a gauge to measure with precision our mental capacities. The time has come for us to revise our whole outlook in regard to the acquisition of knowledge and information. The test of a man's worth will ultimately have to be not how much he knows, but how much he has avoided knowing. This is an urgent necessity since we are beginning to show every symptom of mental overweight, like a lorry or a bus which has been overloaded.

People attempt to know too much of everything and are none the happier for it. Starting with one's own inner aspects : between a man who knows what goes on inside his system and the one who has no notion of it, the latter has a better chance of attaining health and cheer. You will not be able to take in a mouthful of food if you become so well informed as to be fully aware of the number of calories and the vitamin contents of each morsel. A doctor complained that some of his patients seemed to know too much about their own hearts, forming their own notions as to how their hearts should throb and behave, becoming quite panicky if they felt the slightest palpitation at the top of a staircase, and never accepting any medicine unless they were told what the ingredients were and how they worked, these people never have a day of free and healthy feeling. As a contrast he mentioned the case of

an old gentleman with a blood pressure of 230 and a load of eighty-six years on his back, who has never thought of his heart and has never heard of pressure or thrombosis, and who has actually pulled through three attacks of it with his cheer and health only slightly impaired. "At the worst he is confined to bed for three or four days, responds to treatment, swallows any medicine given, and never thinks there is anything wrong with him except that a little buttermilk he took some days before seems to have upset his system and made his limbs stiff." The trouble with most persons is that they read too many books, pick up too many medical and scientific tidbits and all sorts of jargon, and create a lot of misery for themselves. In the interest of public welfare, the doctor suggested that medical books should hereafter be written in an entirely new language which will make sense only to the professional men.

There is a great deal to be said for the thought that ignorance is bliss. I may be blamed for advocating so openly a course of ignorance when every country in the world is clamouring for more and more education and greater means of attaining knowledge. Educational conferences and seminars are going on all over the world all the time, literacy drives are being kept up unrelentingly. Still I feel that too much striving for knowledge and information is unwholesome. If I can have my way I shall organize a world-wide celebration of a less knowledge day to be followed by another day for the promotion of healthy ignorance. The details of these celebrations will have to be worked out later, but of one thing I am certain : it is that on this particular day people will resolve not to know anything and will do their best to remain in total ignorance of various matters. The

possibilities are immense. No amount of theorizing can ever convey the wonderful possibilities of this state. If the technique of ignorance is properly developed it should become possible for a man to switch off his mind completely at will and shake his head in blissful oblivion when asked, "What is two and two ?" or "Which is the capital of Great Britain ?" This will carry the swing of the pendulum to the other extreme. When it is accomplished we may make a new start, being then in a position to form a better notion of how much to know and of what.

## OF TRAINS AND TRAVELLERS

I have a weakness for odd trains, some shuttle or passenger which will crawl through the countryside and stop long enough at unknown stations to enable one to gain an idea of the life and habits there. I like to reach my destination by a series of such hops rather than by a masterful, purposeful mail rushing along to its terminus without pausing to look this way or that. The disadvantage of travelling by such a strict train is that one glides past most places at dead of night. For instance, Salem or Jalarpet are stations which I have crossed hundreds of times these many years, but without any idea of what they look like. In order to remedy this deficiency in general knowledge, I have taken to travelling by unspectacular day trains. Not the least part of the delight of such a journey being that you find the human element within the compartment as attractive as the landscape without. (During a night journey, preoccupation with the problem of sleep distorts the human personality.)

The bearded *sadhu* who occupies a corner with scorn on his face for all worldly goods including railway tickets ; the meek paterfamilias taking his wife and numerous children somewhere, always consumed with anxiety lest they should be crowded out of their seats ; the businessman and his friend lounging back and continuously shouting over the din their prowess in market operations ; the bully stretching himself out on a complete seat in full luxury, daring anyone to approach him ; the glutton who can never allow a single edible pass outside the window without

stopping and buying one, every time haggling over price and quality and showing no inclination to produce his cash till the train actually begins to move, compelling every vendor to trot beside the train ; the season-ticket student showing off his familiarity with the railway by perching himself precariously on the foot board or at the doorway ; these are familiar characters one meets in any journey.

There is one other type of person who grips everybody's attention the moment he enters a train. He is the loquacious man. He can never leave anyone alone. His air of assurance and friendliness win him a new listener, if not a friend, every moment. It may be said that this man attempts to guide the life and thought of everyone in the compartment. There a child may cry. Our friend will not only persuade the child to remain quiet but also explain to the mother how children should be brought up, what should be done if they suffer from stomach ache, how to treat a cold, how to tackle bad temper or mischief. If need be he can move everybody and clear a space for the young mother to spread out a piece of cloth and put her child to sleep. He once cleared a lot of space for elders by persuading all the children to sit in a row on an upper berth. One might take him to be a child specialist until one sees him turn his attention to the next subject. He may happen to notice the glutton eat his orange when he will yell out, "How much did you pay for the orange ?" and follow it up with a discourse on the ups and downs of the orange trade, the method of its cultivation and the geography of the country where it is grown. If he happens to see the actual transaction, this or any other, you may rest assured he will throw his weight on the side of the buyer and force the vendor to bring down his price. If he overhears some others in a

corner talking among themselves of political matters, he will step in and put an end to their conversation, compelling them to listen to his own talk. He is one who knows all that goes on behind the scenes at New Delhi. He can explain why this policy is being pursued or why the other one is dropped. He knows who is at the back of everything. He may even claim to be the one who originated the Janata express, Shatabdi concession, or the Hindusthan coach, through his mysterious agencies in the proper quarters. When he mentions the Parliament he assumes the look of one who bears it like a burden on his back. He knows all the persons that pull the strings that move the puppets in the Parliament and in the Cabinet. His hints about his own participation in various political activities built up a background to whatever he says and give them a touch of credibility. He can mention most of the personages at Delhi by their pet names ; it may take time for an ordinary man to spot them out under his terms. Not for him the word Prime Minister but just Jawahar ; for most of the others in the government he employs mystifying initials and abbreviations.

This man gives one the impression that he travels for no other purpose than to gain a first-hand impression of how people are faring. He demands very little from others except a hearing which he will get anyway. He hardly keeps a seat for himself, always surrendering it to anyone who may look for more space. I have always wanted to ask whether he possesses a ticket or not, but could never muster enough courage to put the question to him.

## A LIBRARY WITHOUT BOOKS

I am generally put off by the expression library movement. The very word movement endows the whole business with an abstract, unreal air. It produces in one's mind a picture of humanity, jammed together, moving in a mass towards a goal—a very impressive picture, no doubt, but having nothing to do with the business of reading. Or am I mistaken in thinking that the champions of the library movement are interested in the business of reading? Library science seems all concerned with systems of classification, shelves, furniture, locks, keys, registers, vouchers and statistics, everything except reading. The most noticeable deficiency in any library today seems to be a lack of propaganda for books themselves. It would be useful to inscribe on every library wall the motto: "Books are meant to be read and not merely to be classified and preserved." In every library elaborate rules are being framed for the borrowing and returning of books. There is a university library that I visit where there are so many regulations for book-borrowing that few ever find the time to go in and borrow a volume. You have to spend half an hour before you get through the formalities of picking up a book from the shelf, and another half an hour before you can get through the various entries and signatures and go out of the library. Compared to this the ceremony of getting through a custom's inspection looks child's play. In every library there are so many involved technicalities for this transaction that I sometimes wonder if they would not do

better to keep dummy books with gilt titles in sealed *almirahs*, so that they may only be seen and counted and never taken out, which seems to be the best way of keeping a library secure, above reproach from auditors and with unimpeachable stock register.

The great handicap for the libraries now is that governments have begun to take an interest in them, and eminent men utilize them as themes for grandiose speeches. As a result of it, most library efforts get entangled in redtape and become a matter of cess, authority, statistics and funds.

Recently when I visited a certain important town I saw a new library building coming up at feverish speed. The name boards of the architect, contractor, electrician and sanitary engineers stood up on all sides of the compound in letters of gold. The ground was swept, lawns were laid and watered desperately, and all workmen were finishing up their tasks by gaslight. I felt pleased : the thought that someone was hurrying on at a desperate speed to provide cultural amenities to the townsmen was a very pleasant and sustaining thought. I felt that you couldn't see that zest in any other part of the world. I felt that the friendship of those who were responsible for it was worth cultivating. I sought them out and expressed my feelings. They were naturally pleased with the compliment and were willing to give me all the facts connected with it. I learnt that the building was costing them two lakhs of rupees. They gave me the names of all technicians who were at work there, and concluded, "According to the terms of the contract the building must be handed over to us by the tenth of this month."

"Why such a firm date?"

"Otherwise it will be no use for us. Sri. . . . will be passing this way on the tenth and he has agreed to perform the opening ceremony. If the building is not in our hands on that date it will be practically useless for us afterwards." I could not accept the statement. "Why do you say it will be useless ? You may always stock the books and start using the building any moment, irrespective of whether an eminent man is passing this way or not."

"Oh, books !" he said. "We are not bothered about that now. We are thinking only of the opening ceremony." I could not help asking : "When are you going to bother about it, anyway ?"

"Oh, can't say. It will depend upon the funds available at the end of all this."

"If and when you decide to admit books into the library what will be your procedure for acquiring them?"

"We will probably call for tenders for the supply of books. We want to encourage the local booksellers and distribute the patronage evenly."

I couldn't help asking, "How are you going to select the volumes ?"

"We shall leave it to the booksellers. We shall first measure the total shelf space, get an approximate idea of the number of volumes required to fill them, and call for quotations for the supply of this quantity. Anyway we are not going to worry about this detail now. Our first requirement is building and furniture. After that we must find funds for sending up someone for library training; for which we are already receiving numerous applications."

And so I gathered the following facts and figures about the library :

Building Rs. 2,00,000; lighting Rs. 15,000; plumbing, etc., Rs. 12,000 ; garden layout and supervisors' charges

Rs. 5,000 ; counters, shelves and furniture Rs. 30,000 ; opening ceremony: printing of invitations, welcome address, president's speech and secretary's report Rs. 2,000; *Pandal* and tea Rs. 4,000, and books : no budget yet.

## THE DONKEY

What is the difference between donkey and ass? They mean the same thing, although for donkey my dictionary adds the comment: "Etymology dubious." The terms are interchangeable. When one tires of saying ass one takes up the word donkey. There may be painstaking scholars in our midst who are in a position to state how often Shakespeare has used the one or the other expression and in what context. This is what the donkey needs most at the moment.

People habitually view its existence with the greatest indifference. The time has come for this creature to demand its share of notice in civilised society. At present it is the most unnoticed animal in the world. Aesop, of course, wrote of its appearing in a lion's skin, the only instance of any positive role given to it. Perhaps the *Panchatantra* may have something on similar lines. Apart from these stray instances the bulk of mankind ignores it, chiefly because it is unobtrusive. Here is an instance of a virtue being overdone. Goodness has its limit, beyond which it proves suicidal. If God had only endowed this animal with the slightest dose of pugnacity, such as we see in a cow now and then, people would have adopted a different view of it. Its kick is supposed to be lethal, but I shall not accept the view until I hear someone speak of it from firsthand experience, either as a sight-seer or a near victim.

This animal has practised to perfection a certain hermitlike aloofness. It conducts itself like one wrapped

in a beatific vision. Its forbearance is not of this world. Its non-interference, its total lack of viciousness, are all virtues which human beings strive to attain by laborious practice.

In terms of money value it is the cheapest creature in the world. I found it out from a talk I had with my *dhozi*. He said that you could buy an ass, with all its limbs intact, for about three rupees. Imagine being able to acquire a thing that breathes and moves for the price of a cigarette tin !

The topic came about this way. I advised him to acquire a washing machine instead of spending so much on the purchase and maintenance of donkeys. He laughed at the notion and explained that for the price of a washing machine he could have nearly two hundred donkeys. "Two hundred !" I cried in astonishment. "What about feeding them ? That is bound to swallow you up !" He ignored me and proceeded with the counting of wash. I pressed him to take note of my remark and give me an explanation. He replied, "Feeding ! The expenses of feeding a hundred or more donkeys are just the same as feeding one !" He explained that this was a creature whose food habits need cause no one any worry. It demanded nothing, expected nothing and practically lived on nothing. He admitted that, although he was the master of a dozen donkeys, which carried on their backs all that mountainous quantity of washed and unwashed linen, he had never bothered to watch their dietetic habits. His observations were most casual. He said at first that they lived on old newspapers. No doubt, one could command a varied fare on this, but where are old papers to be had with all the brisk trade going on in them ? In the good old days one could see a portion of a newspaper sticking out of the

mouth of a wayside donkey, but the chances of coming on this spectacle today seem remote indeed, with all that clamour of paper traders filling our streets all parts of the day.

When I pointed this out, my *dhobi* said that his donkeys fed themselves on falling tree leaves. I ruled out this possibility. Our *Vanamahotsava* plantings, such as those as are still visible, are displaying only a geological rate of development. He said lamely that they ate the turf on the roadside. He knew that he sounded hollow while saying it. He became vague, but of one thing I could be definite : he himself gave it nothing to eat. Yet it survived and carried all the burden heaped on its back. It was a *vayubakshaka* as far as he was concerned. The moment it came home from the river or the lake and was unloaded, it was driven off, and he looked for it again only on the next washing day.

There was one other point which I asked him to clarify. How did he identify his animal where there were so many of them looking alike ? He merely said "Oh, we know our animals." "Does it respond to any name ?" I asked. "No," he said, "no one gives it a name."

Nameless, unfed, uncomplaining, undemanding, not harming anyone in thought, word or deed, I wonder if there is a more sublime nature in all creation. The narrow strip of a catwalk shade is enough for it on the roadside : there it stands with bowed head. It never looks up even at a companion standing beside it. It is a well-known fact that when two donkeys stand beside a wall they stand parallelly, but facing opposite directions. Each behaves as if the other did not exist. Its detachment is perfect. The world may rush around it in the excitement of track-

ing a flying saucer, or may be going up in a fluff through the labours of its atomic scientists, but the donkey will never look up.

## THE NEW CALENDAR

I am not one who is afraid of diversity. "Unity in diversity," people say in a sort of habitual manner, which appears to me to destroy the very purpose of diversity. What diversity is worth its name unless it keeps things diverse? There are some things in which unity is desirable, and some in which diversity is desirable. We must not get into the habit of blindly recommending unity in every diversity. Now, variety in calendars is a matter in which one might justifiably say, "The more the merrier." Why not? I learnt with considerable pleasure that the different parts of our country are following thirty different calendars, differing in the era beginning, the initial date of the year and in the methods of calculation. This variety is supposed to create confusion in our midst, but I do not accept the theory. Far from confusion, I believe it could make our lives richer and livelier. Almost every other week we shall have occasion to wish someone "A Happy New Year!" So many more greetings going out by post may also mean so much more income for the postal department, which may lead to a reduction in the price of postcards and stamps. And, of course more holidays too, although some misanthropic industrial economist may point out that it will affect our total turnover of work. One need not pay any attention to such unsocial remarks. Things will, somehow, adjust themselves. Compared to other countries, we enjoy the largest number of holidays in a year, and it has not done us any harm; just a few more will not do us much harm either.

Perhaps everyone cannot take such a complacent view of the calendar situation, especially when he learns that all this diversity of date and the consequent confusion are a direct result of eight-hundred years of foreign aggression of all kinds. Until A.D. 1200, when India passed under foreign invaders, our astronomers at Ujjain and at other centers took the trouble of correcting their calculations according to their direct observation of heavenly bodies. After A.D. 1200 the indigenous centers of astronomical study were all broken up, and the new rulers did not bother about the subject, as a result of which numerous calendars sprang up according to local usage, custom and the enterprise of any calendar promoter.

Against this rather sombre background calendar reform assumes some significance. If we want a uniform calendar it is not only because we wish to avoid confusion, duplication and so forth, but it becomes a matter of prestige, an act of freedom when eight centuries of servitude have come to a close. But we must also face the truth that we now live in a controversy-ridden world, and any attempt to change a calendar may rouse one section to declare (however baseless its calculations may be), "Our calendar is perfect in every way; it is only the other calendars that are wrong." It may become an issue; everyone may clamour to have his own calendar adopted countrywide. Meetings may be held, someone may start a fast unto death, and the New Delhi telegraph offices may resound with messages : "Pray stop tampering with our calendars" or "Viewing with grave misgivings calendar reform. Situation critical. Deputation arriving Delhi soon. Defer decision."

I have a perfect scheme for calendar reform, ideally suited to a state with secular aims. I propose to abolish

all months and years. After all, time is an illusory thing and what we need is some mark of its progression. We do not need months and years for it. All our troubles are due to frequent mention of months and years. In my scheme we shall do without this encumbrance. Fix some day as the first of an epoch and number the days continuously from it. Three hundred and sixty-five days in a year ; three thousand six hundred and fifty days for ten years, and thirty-six thousand five hundred days for a century. The thing to do is to begin a century and number its days continuously, without a break. I don't think we need worry ourselves for more than a century at a time, considering that most of us now living may not have much to do with the affairs of the next one. My scheme eliminates all unnecessary writing such as date, month and year in correspondence. All human transaction is bound to become extremely simplified when one can write, "With reference to your letter dated 2900."

## THE P. W. D.

The P.W.D. is symbolised for me by a harassed looking, sun-scorched, executive officer wandering around a government building, trailing behind him a measuring tape. He is unmindful of what goes on in and around the building. He measures, jots down a few things in his pocket diary, scrutinizes a blueprint, and moves on. He does not in the least care what goes on about him. He may be in a hospital whose walls are echoing agony and suffering, or in a library stacked with exciting books, or in a court hall where a man's life is hanging on a verdict, but his eyes see nothing except the walls, floor, and ceiling. He is a yogi in his own way, whose mind is fixed on an ultimate object, and all the rest, including human beings with all their noise and movement, is in the nature of distractions on the way. Brick, mortar and sand are his only realities in life, and other alignment and grouping strictly according to the blueprint is his sole aim in life ; estimates and revised estimates and check measurements being thrilling adjuncts to his existence. He is not interested in anything else in life. He has every reason to be treated as one who lives for a dedicated cause, but yet people have a feeling of uneasiness when they hear the word P.W.D. I think it is due to the general feeling of despair that, for various reasons, overwhelms us whenever we think of buildings and constructions. Our noblest aims are sidetracked in gathering a building fund, and by the time we see a building rise it is more than likely that we have lost not only the original vision, but

also the original purpose. Buildings are an obsession with us both in private and public life, and we resent this tyranny. Although the P.W.D. concerns itself with various other activities, the ordinary man associates it with only public buildings. P.W.D. means, to most persons, redtapism at its knottiest. Once I could not contain myself when I saw a group of persons working feverishly on a building all night with the aid of gaslights. I could not help asking, "Why are you working like this?" "If we don't get going on this before the thirty-first instant, we shall have to get fresh estimates sanctioned."

"What is wrong with that?" I asked.

"Oh, it is no joke getting a lapsed estimate revived. It will take a long time. Actually the sanction for this work came two years after the proposal was sent, and we received it only nine months ago."

"Then why did you not start the work immediately?"

"They did not specify the priority and so we had to refer it back to the works committee; though generally we do not take all this trouble, in this particular instance we made this reference because the work was of an urgent nature, and it came back to us with top priority only eight weeks ago...."

"You could have done a great deal in two months!"

"How? It is not so easy. The execution has to be sanctioned by the executive engineer... (a place 150 miles away). Otherwise we cannot take it up."

"You are the man on the spot. How can he know of its urgency?"

"But I am only an assistant engineer. I can only forward a sanctioned proposal, but I cannot take up the execution unless it is sanctioned by the executive engineer. After receiving this sanction I had to call for tenders,

and then I had to get the approval of the executive engineer again for the tender I accepted. After that there was some unexpected delay because the secretary of the stores purchases committee, whose signature is necessary for release of certain materials, was away on leave."

"Surely there must have been another man in his place during his absence?" I asked.

"Yes, there was an acting man, but an acting secretary has no power to release materials for estimates beyond two thousand rupees. Of course I could have got over the difficulty by splitting the present estimate into four of two thousand each, but it is not always safe. Sometimes auditors give us a lot of trouble over such deviations...."

This whole matter referred to an additional maternity ward in a hospital, which was urgently needed, I suppose, but no one who was responsible for getting the building work through seemed to be aware of its importance or purpose. Though such detachment is a highly desirable quality, I fear that it has its own defects. It leads to a lack of appreciation of not only human urgency but also of esthetic standards. Some time ago I visited a Hoysala temple built a thousand years ago, a veritable treasure house of minutely done carvings and images, and an architectural masterpiece. Unfortunately, its renovation was in the hands of the P.W.D., who had perpetrated a variety of esthetic atrocities all over the place. They had added (on the original plinth) a reinforced concrete block with cantilever projections and everything complete, without bothering for a moment to consider whether it fitted in with the rest of the architecture or not; they had plastered with thick cement or lime all the cornices and ceiling, and above all some of the images were whitewashed.

All this was a piece of brightening-up programme undertaken on the eve of a distinguished visitor's arrival. I didn't have to ask who had done it. Presently, going round, I saw an ancient pillared hall stacked with cement bags and beyond it was packed a lorry carrying on it the stamp : P.W.D.

## THE GOLDEN AGE

Historians are fond of mentioning a golden age in their books. It generally gives a picture of a time when a king ruled benignly, denying himself all the pleasures of life, taxing his subjects lightly, meting out justice with a blind impersonality (of course without altering the laws from time to time); the citizens displayed overwhelming affection for one another and were all engaged in pleasing and charitable activities. Our poets depict old Ayodhya as a place where there was no charity because there was no need for it, where the doors had no padlocks and the houses had no doors, and where the police were unemployed and eventually even disbanded. Let us not ask what they did with all the disbanded policemen or how badly the padlock industry was hit or what the carpenters did for a living. Our thoughts are nowadays trained to run on lines of employment, economics, etc., which complicate our views of Ram Rajya. It was probably very rash of them to have undertaken to shape our country into Ram Rajya as though it could be done with a chisel and hammer; it has only made us expect too much of our rulers and offered a ready-made theme for every carping journalist.

I am sure that in any golden age, even in the actual Ram Rajya, people must have cherished their grousing. Life would be boring and unreal otherwise. J. B. Priestley confesses in one of his books to being a born grumbler and liking his role: this is the real privilege anyone enjoys in any corporate life. We may rest assured

that on any normal working day during any golden age the citizens would have had their asides regarding the corruption in high places, the deafness of those in authority, or how the ideal king's favourite, his brother-in-law, was doing everything possible to spoil the king's judgment and ruin the country. Or the people might even have complained of the general boredom of excessive goodness everywhere. If anyone of those times had had the prophetic vision to see our present-day life as it is, he would probably have held it out to them as a model : the hectic politics, the explosive possibilities, the newspaper screams, the radio noise, the cinema glare, and all the rugged ups and down of modern life might have appealed irresistibly to this ancient visionary and filled him with a longing to jump out of the golden age into ours. He must have been unaware of the excellences of his own times that made the latter-day poets and historians wax so eloquent.

We experience the same difficulty in fixing the golden age in our own personal life too. We always think of it as something ahead of us or behind us. Every birthday reminds us of something achieved long ago or yet to be achieved. People have a tendency to talk of "good old days," with an undisguised sentimentality, but it never carries conviction whether it is said in the assembly of "old boys" in a college or in private conversation. Actually the days of youth or boyhood, if anyone truthfully recollects, were days of travail : the constant dependence, fear of elders, varying alliances and friendships, sadistic class teachers, examination harassments, pursuit of employment, and a variety of incomunicable anxieties and gloom made our earlier years miserable. The period between youth and middle age is considered to be good

and desirable, but no one would be prepared to call it the best years of one's life if one recollects truthfully the early struggles of a young person just starting family life. There is a widespread practice of celebrating the sixtieth birthday. "Why the sixtieth and not the fortieth?" commented a friend on receiving an invitation for a *Shashtiabda-Poorthi* celebration. He suggested that they ought to find a Sanskrit equivalent for forty, as high-sounding as *Shashtiabda-Poorthi*, and then celebrate it with the greatest vigour. "If I had the choice, I would rather have a purse presented to me on attaining my fortieth year than on my sixtieth. At forty, one's responsibilities keep growing and a purse from well-wishers would come in most handy." His argument was that if one could survive the struggle for existence till sixty one needed none of the attentions of well-wishers at the end of it.

Is there anyone who can say precisely which is his golden age—a time when he could live without hankering after a future or regretting a vanished past, and when he could live without wasting the moment of actual existence? If this could be fixed, then it ought to be celebrated with the greatest vigour.

## A WRITER'S NIGHTMARE

A few nights ago I had a nightmare. I had become a citizen of a strange country called Xanadu. The government all of a sudden announced the appointment of an officer called the controller of stories. All the writers in the country sent up a memorial to their representative in parliament, and he asked at the next session of the house : May we know why there is a new department called the controller of stories ?

From the government benches came the answer : "Through an error in our Government printing section five tons of forms intended for the controller of *stores* were printed controller of *stories*, an unwanted 'I' having crept into the text. Consequently the government was obliged to find a use for all this printed stuff."

"What sort of use ?" asked the member.

"Since the stationery was inadvertently ready a department of stories was started."

"Was a new incumbent entertained for the post of controller of stories and, if so, will the honourable minister quote the public services commission circular in this regard ; what is the cost of this post and where are you going to get the money for it and under what head is it going to be charged and who will be the deciding authority and will you place on the table a copy of the auditor-general's remark in this regard," went on the parliament member, trying to get the minister into an entanglement of linked-up questions. The minister was familiar with such tactics and curtly replied, "The answer to A is in

the negative, B the government is watching the situation, C the question does not arise, D see B, E it will not be in public interest to answer the question at present....” He spoke so fast, without a pause, that the questioner got derailed and lost track of his own questions. Undaunted, he asked again, “Will the honourable minister explain if this is in keeping with the government’s recent economy drive ?”

“The answer is in the affirmative.”

“Will he kindly explain himself ?”

“Yes. In the first place we have managed to utilise a vast quantity of printed paper. Anyone who is familiar with the world shortage in paper will appreciate this move, and in the second place there is no extra expenditure involved in starting this department since the controller of stores will be *ex officio* controller of stories and will generally conduct the affairs of this department, for after all stories are also stores in a manner of speaking.”

“May we know the why and how and what-about-what and wherefore of this department ?”

“I am glad to have an opportunity to speak on this issue. The government is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of stories in our national life. Since this is a welfare state the government is obliged to keep a watch over all the activities that affect our citizens. It has come to our notice recently that sufficient attention is not being paid by the authors in this country to the subject of story. The government has observed that, next to rice and water, stories are the most-demanded stuff in daily life.... Every moment someone or other is always asking for a story. It may be a child asking his teacher or a novel-reader his author or a magazine-buyer his editor or a film producer who has spent lakhs and

lakhs and has every equipment ready except a story, and of course all our radio stations and theaters, too, demand stories. The demand is far in excess of supply, and may I add even where a story is seen it turns out to be deplorably bad stuff ? The government has made up its mind that they will not tolerate bad stories any more.”

At this point the question-master interrupted with, “May we know what is meant by bad stories ? Will the honourable minister quote instances ?”

“No. I cannot mention any specific bad stories at this juncture, since that would lead to the suspicion that invidious distinctions are being made, but I would like to point out that bad stories are stories that are not good, and our honourable friend must be satisfied with it for the moment.”

“May we know how this department is to function ?” asked the member.

“Presently, the controller of stories will undertake the formation of a body called the central story bureau which will immediately go into the business of formation of a chief story officer for each state.”

“May we know what it will have to do with the story writers in the country ?”

“Every story writer must fill up Form A, obtain a local treasury certificate for ten rupees, and forward both to the central story bureau (general branch), and he will receive an endorsement entitling him to call himself a registered story writer. Thereafter, whenever he has an inspiration for a story, long or short, he will have to send a synopsis of it in quadruplicate to the C.S bureau (technical branch), and obtain its approval before proceeding to expand the work further.”

“Why should it be in quadruplicate ?”

"For facilitating procedure. The central story bureau, technical branch, will consist of four directorates, one each for plot, character, atmosphere and climax, and each section will examine the proposed story in respect of its own jurisdiction and may suggest emendations and improvements in respect of the story before issuing a final authorisation certificate to the author, which must be prominently displayed in his study. Any author who attempts to write a story without proper authorisation will be fined five hundred rupees and imprisoned for a period not exceeding eighteen months. . . . The government has every desire to avoid these extreme measures, its sole aim being improvement of national culture, and we have every hope that all this will bring about a revolution in story writing within the next ten years. Incidentally I wish to inform the house that we are presently inaugurating a national story week which will see the birth of a write-better-stories movement all over the country . . . ." He concluded, "All this is in the nature of an effort on the part of the government for improving the standard of story writing in this country. We shall watch the results, and let me say," here he raised his voice, "Let me warn all bad story writers that I shall not hesitate to smash their ink bottles. We don't want bad stories in this country in any form. We shall watch the situation and see how it develops, and if writers fail to show any improvement, which we shall be in a position to judge from the quarterly reports submitted by the regional story officers, I have no hesitation in saying that we, on this side of the house, will take to story-writing ourselves. . . ."

And, at this stage, I woke up.

## POPULARITY

"Lives of great men...remind us that we can make ours sublime," declared the poet. I read those lines many years ago, but happening to re-read them recently I found in them a new meaning. They sounded to me more like a warning against greatness addressed to a possible aspirant. It seemed to mean that lives of great men remind us that we ought to try and make ours sublime rather than great. There seems to be implicit in these lines a criticism of greatness itself, which is worth a little examination. The poet seems to say, "If you watch the great at close quarters, you will understand what a worrying condition of life it is. Greatness is a state that you had better avoid. If you have energy for a pursuit spend it in the direction of sublimity." The really great man, whatever may be his achievement, can have no rest or peace of mind. His personal life becomes inconsequential to him, and he is likely to spend his life fretting against the shortcomings and deficiencies of this world, although a lesser person may be able to take it all for granted and practise greater tolerance. The great man is likely to make himself and all those around him miserable during his lifetime, and go to his grave, his heart worn out with frustration of fatigue.

.. Famous lines of poetry, particularly when they are taken out of their contexts, have a tendency to produce unexpected meanings, and what I have said above is only an exercise in interpretation, and I hope no one grudges me this entertainment.

Anyway, what is greatness? I don't know if it could be measured by the total newspaper space occupied by a particular name in a given generation. Or is greatness assured for anyone who is entitled to a half-tone block in any history book? I have a feeling that greatness itself may be an obsolete word today. Its place is being taken by a more democratic word: popularity. It places the aspiration within everybody's reach. Most persons today pursue not greatness but just popularity. It is just popularity for its own sake: this man feels sad if he does not see his affable image in every group photo in the town. It would be more understandable if a man sought popularity for the sake of an election. Kissing slum children on the eve of an election is a familiar democratic practice. One ought to strive for popularity if one wants votes, naturally, or, in the case of a shopman to keep his clients in good humour. It becomes part and parcel of a professional life. But what I am not able to understand is why does everyone attempt it? Why should everyone pursue a sort of aimless popularity? It is such a strain. Smiling affably at all and sundry can be a very taxing business. Man must follow his natural inclination, which is to look away when he is in no mood to engage himself in conversation with his fellow men he may meet on the way, but the popularity-seeker can never afford to do it. Whatever may be his feelings, he must almost cry out, "How do you do?" and listen to the answer. It is nice to hear others say of oneself, "Oh, he is a fine fellow." It is a worthy testimonial from one's fellow men but there is a heavy price to pay for it. Popularity is more easily attained than kept. A man who attains a name for charm, sympathy, efficiency or competence will have to be walking on a knife edge all the time. It is like retaining

a world title. His reputation becomes a terrific responsibility. He cannot afford to make the slightest mistake. Any slight failing on his part will drag him down completely. This is a great bother for all artists, musicians and actors, who are expected to be at their best at all times and who must expect to hear the comment any moment, "Oh, his standards are deteriorating deplorably."

On the contrary, I think a little striving for unpopularity will go a long way in assuring one of a tranquil existence. If a man gets a reputation for crankiness, he receives a lot of considerate treatment from his fellow men. If a musician has a reputation for invariably disappointing his audience, people generally flock to his performance, and later on remark charitably, "Well, that was to be expected of him." On the other hand, if he has managed to exhibit the slightest merit, his audience will be in raptures over it, because it has relished the element of surprise in it. If a man has a reputation for being very surly and unsocial, he enjoys a lot of liberty thereby. He will not be expected to keep an appointment or be punctual. "Oh, we can do nothing with him, he is made that way," people will remark with a lot of tolerance. No one will mind it if he does not answer letters ; nor will he be expected to attend marriage receptions or send out congratulations or condolences. People expect nothing better of him, and thereby he enjoys an enviable freedom of action and speech.

## UMBRELLA DEVOTEE

I read with great pleasure the recent news that the prices of umbrellas (why not 'umbrellae' for plural in order to add to the dignity of the subject?) have fallen. I am one of those, I believe it is a somewhat select group, who believe that every adult should have a minimum of three umbrellas : one for personal use, one for leading and one for reserve in case all the umbrellas suddenly vanish from the face of this earth through some freak action such as an atomic blast. Deep within, the umbrella devotee is a prey to all kinds of phobias. And not all the phobias are unfounded, if we remember how well founded is his impression that all are frantically attempting to get at his umbrella all the time. He cannot leave it resting in a corner and be sure that he can find it there when he wants it again. Everyone thinks that he can pick up any umbrella that he sees. The man who would hesitate to pick up my ring never hesitates to snatch away my old umbrella hanging in its stand. It is this utter disregard for ownership in umbrellas that is responsible for all the confusion and irritation that we notice in the umbrella business today. I heard a friend confess recently, "I have five umbrellas and five hundred enemies." He explained, "I make enemies this way : I have five umbrellas because I like to have five, that is all ; I have as much right to have five umbrellas as I have to have five fingers. Anyone who questions why I should possess five umbrellas sounds impertinent to my ears and gets the appropriate reply. And then when they ask me to lend them my umbrella

I invariably refuse to do so ; that makes people call me selfish and I retort appropriately. People are sometimes persistent and will plead and cajole till I give them my umbrella. Of course it is given with stern warnings and stipulations regarding time and place of its return, but I am yet to come across a single creature who remembers this injunction ; ninety out of a hundred will not remember their obligations. In the end I have to undertake a trip to retrieve my umbrella, and then I do not hesitate to tell a person what I think of him. Moreover, it is a well-established fact that ninety-nine out of a hundred do not know how to hold an umbrella : when I find a tear in the cloth or a loosened rib or handle, I tell the borrower plainly that he ought to be sent to jail for it. People do not appreciate forthright comments. I am sorry to say that most persons deserve this castigation : no one knows how to handle an umbrella; some have the distressing habit of twirling its handle while walking, or holding it too high or too low, right over their skulls as if it were a cap ; all this will ruin an umbrella."

"There is a technique in using an umbrella as in all things. There should be neither stiffness nor too much flexibility at the wrist of an arm that holds an umbrella ; it must be adjusted properly to the pressure of the wind. Wind is an insidious enemy whose effect is most wearing ; the ribs may be made of iron but it is as a broomstick to the wind. What must protect an umbrella is an understanding wrist. How can everyone understand this subject, when most people never think of an umbrella except when it rains ? I wish they would include a course in umbrella-holding in all educational institutions. Just fifteen minutes a day for two or three days in the week and it would produce wonderful results.

It must be based on the same footing as compulsory military training. Another reason why all these unpleasant things exist about umbrellas is that there are far too many persons in each of our households and too few umbrellas. In a normal joint-family household there are at least ten persons in a house, but how many umbrellas are there to be found? Just one, where it ought to be really thirty on the basis that everyone should have at least three umbrellas. What happens is this: one umbrella probably belongs to an enthusiast, but everyone has his eye on it whenever he wants protection from sun or rain. It is either sunny or rainy, one or the other, and the umbrella is in danger of getting into circulation. Fortunately nobody asks for your umbrella when there is the moon; I believe it is due to that wonderful proverb which says that only an upstart will hold an umbrella over his head at midnight. We need more and more of such proverbs. I believe one way in which people may be induced to own their umbrellas is to include the question in every form that is to be filled out. Form-filling for one purpose or another is a necessity, for ration, passport, education, employment or anything, in which a lot of questions are asked regarding age, ancestry, etc., of every person, and among all that host of irrelevant questions why not add one more, "Do you possess an umbrella? If so, how long have you had it? How do you manage to keep yours?" This may not always bring forth truthful answers but it will at any rate put people into a proper frame of mind. Nowadays umbrella lovers are viewed as cranks, which is most unfortunate. People openly brag, "Oh, I cannot think of carrying an umbrella in the streets; oh, no, I would never be seen with one." This is a very unhealthy

attitude. They go even a step further and say, "I have lost nearly twenty umbrellas this year." Somehow this is said in a tone of pride. Why should it be made a matter of boastful talk rather than one to be ashamed of ? If this braggart has lost twenty umbrellas, you may rest assured that the losses are someone else's and not his. Existence will not be perfect until it becomes as impossible for a person to carry another man's umbrella as carrying another man's driving licence.

"I do not accept the statement that the slump in the umbrella trade is due to the successive failure of monsoons. No true umbrella devotee will ever be put off by such fickle causes as weather. A man loves his umbrella for its own sake. He would hug his umbrella, whether it is a London-imported variety rolled to look like a stick or whether it is the heavy-canopied flabby one with a cane handle, not because it is hot or rainy but because he has true affection at heart for it."

## THE TALKERS' CLUB

Among all the variety of institutions that are springing up everywhere, I am eagerly looking forward to the birth of a talkers' club. There is a walkers' club, players' club, readers' club and writers' club, serious and purposeful associations of all kinds, but not a single body devoted to talk. Until such a club is formed I see small chance of ever becoming an enthusiastic club man. I am one of those who view with grave concern the dwindling importance of ordinary conversation. The talkative man has fewer chances today to keep his form. The world is getting poorer definitely. People appear to be afraid of conversation. When you go on a visit to a friend's house you notice that he turns on the radio immediately on sighting you. Why this camouflage? The loud jazz music completely falsifies the atmosphere and makes you feel that you are not in a friend's house but in a cinema hall for a matinee show. You never thought till now that anyone broadcast such stuff at these hours, but here are the broadcast stations, very obliging ones, devoted to the noble task of filling our hours and our ears with continuous film hits and sales talk. I feel that this is one of the greatest menaces to friendly conversation today.

"People have lost the capacity to talk," said someone recently. So much the worse for mankind. If two or three of us cannot sit around and pass the time in talk we might as well accept that we have come down to the level of mute creatures (of course without their

innocence). Most subjects of conversation get exhausted within the first five minutes of a meeting. Everyone gives, as a matter of routine, everyone else a brief resume of the day's headlines : the maltreatment of our countrymen in Ceylon or South Africa, the Korean 'truce', 'peace' or 'war' according to one's own understanding, elections, American fireworks on testing grounds, and so on, and then a few comments on the weather and food situation; after that everyone lies back staring at the wall because there is nothing more to say. A little pep may be added here and there by some who are imaginative or habitually read between the lines, but such chances are rare, and even such a conversation has not much promise of coming to life and flourishing, because it is all so well known and stale that even the possible variants are standardised.

Now one can understand the place of cards or mah-jong or chess in present-day life, anything to save people from staring at the wall. All such occupations cover up a lot of embarrassing and embarrassed silence.

The causes of the decay of conversation are complex and involved. The radio, the cinema and the card, are three things which have stopped the mouths of wags. I read recently that television keeps thirty percent of Americans indoors in the evenings. Presently we may hear that the same cause keeps a hundred percent dead silent at home, the one place where we are now able to talk at least with the children. And then cards : the fierce looks that card players dart across at those who show their voices while a game is in progress are enough to paralyse speech for all time to come. Apart from all this, there is also the lack of interesting subjects for talk. Mark my word 'interesting.' The most interesting subject in life

is man. But alas, we have developed a highly artificial style of social life, whereby it is a mark of civilised existence to remain strictly neutral and impersonal in one's talk. This is the main source of present-day dullness. How can there be any activity in life unless we comment on and describe personal matters, ours as well as other peoples? I venerate the memory of a friend who could caricature all his absentee acquaintances in half-a-dozen sentences, and hold you spellbound by narrating the unconscious and solemn absurdities of all the persons he had come across in life. His masterly way of talk could bring back to life persons and scenes dead and gone. He could make you forget your engagement, and he would be as ready to listen to anything you might say. He was a born conversation generator. We need more and more of this type to save us from becoming a dull routine-ridden, formality uttering generation. I hope hereafter a corner will be reserved in all the clubs for talkative men, where convenient lounges are placed, overlooking a lawn or a far-away hillock, away from the reading room and out of earshot of all indoor occupations, and where the raconteur may meet his fellows. When it is done, we shall once more see wit and wisdom and the warmth of human association revive in our midst.

## NEXT SUNDAY

Sunday is the day most looked forward to by everyone. It is the one day which suddenly evaporates before you know where you are. Everyone knows the Saturday-evening feeling, with all the pleasures of expectancy, and the Sunday-evening feeling already tainted by thoughts of Monday. What happens to the day ? It is the day on which so many items are thrust—promises made to children for an outing, promise of a little shopping, calling on someone, and so on and so forth, all promises, promises. There is no way out except by stretching out the twenty-four hours to do the work of forty-eight. Before one notices it the forenoon is gone.

In the morning one decides to stay a little longer in bed and one does it till one is worried out of bed by the noises which start earlier than usual, because it is a Sunday. A radio enthusiast in the next house who has been waiting for this day to tune in an hour earlier, a motor car with its engine going to pieces, children's shouts of joy because they have no school today ; all this goes on while the Sunday devotee is planning to spend an hour longer in bed. The man gets up in a slightly frustrated mood and that is not a very good way to start the day. It knocks all charm out of existence at the very start itself. When one has got up in this mood it is no use hoping for a good life again. It is better to accept it for what it is : that the Sunday is nearly gone. Next, one begins to notice things. On other days one has no time for all those scrutinies and exami-

nations. I know a person who is a very gentle being on all working days but completely turns a somersault on a Sunday. He becomes ferocious and difficult to deal with. He sees that everything at home is going wrong. He is a hobbyist, one who likes to repair things with his own hand. This man draws a heavy schedule of work for Sundays. Hanging a picture, fixing a leaky tap, choking off the squeak in the radio, or oiling the watch or bicycle, are all jobs for a Sunday. All through the week he keeps making a mental note of what he proposes to do on the Sunday. If he could have his way he would have to work far into midnight and a part of the Monday morning also. But he never gets through this arduous programme. No doubt he opens up a radio or a watch the first thing in the day, and squats down like a great god in his workshop. Francis Thompson said of Shelley, "The Universe was his box of joys." We are reminded of this picture when we see this man sitting amidst his toys ; but with this difference : Shelley was pictured as being lost in the delight of creation, while this man is unable to do anything because he finds so many articles missing. A nail which he cherished, a piece of string or wire which he reserved for future use, a precious nut or bolt, and something or the other is always missing, and it enrages him. He has a number of children and his losses are in direct ratio to their numbers. This is not a thing that this irate man can take casually. The children have been helping themselves to various articles all through the week. A blade for pencil mending, a wire for tying up something, something else for something else, and a nut and bolt because they look nice. This man's anger knows no bounds. He calls them, lines them up and starts an investigation. The investi-

gation may lead to useful results or it may not. It is on the laps of gods. One child, impressed by his father's manner, may give up his loot and another may out of a desire to earn a certificate, or they may do nothing of the kind but remain unyielding of their treasures. The man sitting with his box of toys is clearly frustrated. His suspicion is roused and he now proceeds to take stock of all his losses. He hurriedly gets up and opens his cupboard, and presently the household keeps ringing with, "Where is this?" or "What has happened to that?" in varying degrees of petulance. But like Jesting Pilate's, his questions are destined to perish without an answer. People would answer if they could. Others know no more where that hammer is gone, which no one has ever seen, than he does. He realises that he lives in a most unhelpful world. He shoots his question apparently in the general air, but actually aims it at his wife who is busy in an inner part of the house, and at the children who are gleefully watching their father's tantrums and are only waiting for a chance to run away. One of seven years, an intuitive escapist, with apparent innocence suggests that probably such and such a thing is in such and such a place, and should he go and look for it? The irate man falls a prey to this guile. No David more easily vanquished a Goliath. Before the man knows what has happened the young fellow is gone, and once the line-up is broken, it is broken for ever. The man gets absorbed in something else, probably a book or a magazine on his table, and forgets all about it for a while, till he sees the same children unconcernedly playing in the next house. He calls them back by a lusty shout through the window. They all troop back, and the man opens the offensive by asking

about their books and schoolwork, clearly a sadistic design. This leads to an examination of their educational progress and propensities. He discovers that his children have not been developing on the right lines at all ; he had not noticed till now how badly they were growing up—an oblique reference which at once brings down a hot denial from an inner part of the house. He bullies the children for a while and grows tired of it very soon. Now he discovers that half the Sunday is irretrievably lost. There are only a few more hours of sunshine left. He is now reminded of all his promises for this day after he has had his midday meal and has acquired a pleasant mood. He promises to fulfil his obligations after a short nap. When he gets up after his rest he realises that he simply cannot take his family out today. He simply will not spend the balance of this much-battered Sunday at bus stops. He recollects how sometime ago he had to spend two hours at a bus stand with all his children howling with hunger, and all of them had to trek back home late at night. He shudders at the memory and suddenly cries, "Please, let us stay at home. I will take you all out next Sunday."

## THE SYCOPHANT

Sycophancy is one of the oldest professions in the world. Old King Cole was a merry old soul because he could afford to be so. He would have felt choked by his surroundings but for the sycophant who stood by and helped him attain peace of mind. The sycophant may well be called the provider of peace of mind for those in authority. He acts as a shock absorber—even this word is a little ahead of the sense : it would be nearer the mark to say that he acts as a shock repeller. The sycophant is ever watchful and manages to keep his chief from feeling unduly bothered by conscience or commonsense. The sycophant's genius lies in showing a feeling that is not his own but his master's. He cannot afford to assume any colour of his own. His survival depends upon his capacity to take on the hue that his master is likely to assume at any given moment. Hamlet points at the sky and asks Polonius : "Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel ?"

Polonius : "By the mass, and it's like a camel, indeed."

Hamlet : "Methinks it is like a weasel."

Polonius : "It is backed like a weasel."

Hamlet : "Or like a whale ?"

Polonius : "Very like a whale."

I quote this because it seems to me a masterpiece of sycophancy, although Polonius has perhaps other aims, such as wanting to humour a madman, in making himself so agreeable.

The essence of a sycophant's success lies in his capacity to remain agreeable under all conditions. He may not be a lover of children, least of all his master's favourite, the seven-year-old devil. He may feel like spanking him and putting him in his place whenever he sees him, but his first sentence, his opening line for the day, always is : "How is the little charmer, sir?" He has to show a keen interest in the boy's games, books, hobbies and friends ; and cherish for timely use one or two quotations from the young man's speeches which display his wit and wisdom. There is a certain amount of self-abnegation involved in it. The sycophant is one who sacrifices much and bears much, and it is no small strain to remain agreeable under all conditions. After all, when we come to consider it, what is his personal gain in all this? It is not much. All that he seeks is that he be allowed to bask forever in the sunshine of his master's presence. This gives him a reflected glory and an authority which seem to him the most important acquisition in life ; the material and other advantages that may arise therefrom are mere by-products. He practises sycophancy for its own sake, for the pleasure it gives, for the sense of well-being that it spreads all around. This man I would place at the summit of the category. One who practises this fine art for the sake of obvious gains can take only second place in this hierarchy. It has all the difference that we observe between one who is a devotee of art for art's sake and the utilitarian who uses art for propaganda. When we see a man employing sycophancy for some cheap purpose we are seized with the same sense of bathos as overwhelms us while seeing a film, perfectly made in every way but

out to show only the virtues of the caterpillar wheel or of chemical fertilisers.

When the history of mankind comes to be written more fully, I expect a great deal will be included about the sycophant and his influence on human affairs. How many rulers of men, how many despots, lived in worlds of their own, unperturbed by contrary views and outlooks ? In the *Fall of Berlin*, there is a historic instance, which may be of questionable accuracy, but the portrayal itself seems significant. Hitler is told that the fall of Moscow is imminent, a matter of a few minutes. He keeps looking at the time and frets and fumes. A military adviser suggests that Moscow may, probably, never be taken since, in the course of its history, many an invader has had to turn back from its gates. This man is dismissed instantly and a courtier who blindly assures Hitler that the German troops are at the moment marching in the streets of Moscow is promoted very high. We may question the propriety of this presentation but it is a perfect example of the sycophant's role in human affairs.

The American colloquial expression for it is more direct : "Yes man." It seems to me that this expression may not exactly mean sycophancy but something more. "Yes man" appears to be a democratic word. Sycophant was quite adequate for one-man rule, when the ruler did not have to worry about public opinion, but nowadays the ruler has to get through his business with the backing of his yes men, which alone can give it a democratic touch.

The yes man's role is not necessarily confined to politics. Of late he has made his appearance in the scientific world also. When a scientist becomes an yes

man he will assert that the earth is square or flat or crooked, just as it suits his master's mind. Galileo's trouble was that he could not show this accommodating spirit and hence suffered persecution all his life. Now in some places the scientist obviously avoids the folly of Galileo, and is ready to assert that man and not nature should decide how much time wheat or some other corn ought to take to grow and ripen, if his master shows any signs of annoyance at the timetable followed by nature.

I have tried to trace the origin of the word 'Sycophant'. The dictionary says: 'perh. orig.' "one who informed against persons exporting figs," from *sukon* 'fig,' see '*Syconium*,' which injunction I could not lightly ignore. I looked up *Syconium* to know that it was Greek for fig or a near-fig fruit. I have found it very illuminating on the whole. I realised that we have after all been bandying about a word without being aware of its association with the fig business, its export restrictions and possible controls, the men who profited by flouting the law, and the greater profit that other men derived by watching (and informing against) the men who profited by flouting the law, and these last were known as sycophants. This is all only an incidental discovery. My original purpose in turning the pages of a dictionary was to know if sycophant had a feminine form. I am sure it will be a heartening piece of news for many to know that there is no sycophantess just as there is no such thing as yes women.

## THE MAHA

A judicious admixture of Sanskrit and English, I find, produces sometimes a marvellously handy idiom. It may not have the approval of pundits of either language, but I think it is effective. For instance, how fluently speaks one whose sentences fuse into Tamil and English alternately : the tongue naturally selects the easy way. This is not to say that the mongrel breed is the best in a language, but sometimes it is the most effective. English, at any rate, has been so pliant and absorbent that it has become the most resilient language in the world.

I wish to add to this language a new phrase, *maha superiority*. Mahat, the Sanskrit word, seems capable of going in harmoniously with any word in any language; and it is just the word that can add a degree to superior. We want now a word which is above the ordinary superlative ; it is achieved by coining maha superiority.

What is maha superiority ? It is a state beyond the ordinary standards of snobbery. The ordinary snob pales before this man. The common snob may like to show off his wealth or wit, but his horizon is apparently bounded by another class which can show off more wealth or brighter wit. This is the secret sorrow of every snob. He is ever conscious, through all his preening and measured swagger, of a higher snob, to reach whose place is the secret hankering in his heart all the time. He has a sense of superiority to a certain class of persons around him but he has not that absolute

sense of superiority which is the privilege of one who comes under the maha class. The maha superior man has no secret misgivings about his eminence. He feels that the world is at his feet. His uniqueness, he feels, can rouse the envy of gods.

You can generally spot him by his cigarette holder which is the only one of its kind in the world, by his pocket screw pencil of which only a dozen are known to exist in the world. He may not play cricket or any game in the world, but he has a cricket bat given him by Bradman himself with his autograph. His familiarity with all the names which are only newspaper names for the rest of mankind is breath-taking. Don't be surprised if you hear him say, "Once when I put my hands into the Aga Khan's pocket at Nice, do you know how many diamonds I could pick up in a handful?" Or he will talk of the various personal comments made by Clem, Winston or others. "When I ran into them accidentally at Prague last time . . ." or "Franco is not really a bad sort. He once told me . . ." or "At that time I was in a hurry to catch the plane but neither Chiang Kai-shek nor Madame Chiang would let me go without a supper, and their chief of air force phoned the airport to delay the plane for three hours." He is a walking autograph book. He refers to most celebrities by their first names so that most times you may not recognise to whom he is referring. If he says Ingrid or Cecil or Harry, he is quite clear in his head whom he means, though his listeners may take time to sort out the famous star, the famous producer, President of America. America? You will never catch this gentleman on using the word. He will always refer to it as the States. "When I was in the States. . ." You, a

simpleton, are likely to think that unless you say U.S.A. or America in an obvious heavy style, you will not be understood (remembering your political-science definition that a state is one which has an area, population and government, and that there are thousands of states in the world), but this man has no such doubt. He has a mind free from any kind of misgiving or doubt. His conviction is that what is clear to him ought to be clear to the rest of mankind. What he does not notice is not worth noticing. His talk has always an international background. He is a product of too much travel. He is the sort to say, "My second son is in Manchester, training in textile.... My daughter is in Cambridge ; I put her there directly she passed her high school ; I had to rush up to see about her admission personally although I was busy in Rio de Janeiro at that time. After all we must take the trouble to settle our children's lives.... I have always been keen on my children getting a cosmopolitan outlook. Our standards must become international in all matters."

The air-travel bag has now taken the place of the Kaiser-i-Hind medal or the old decorations of a Dewan Bahadur. The maha superior man's contempt for the slow-witted land or sea travellers is unbounded. He is ever trying to impress on them the casual ease with which he performs his journey. "Do you know I never carry anything ? I go on with just a dhoti and a banian...." You are astounded. You thought in your innocence that one had to put on a tie or a long coat or things like that. It is all for lesser folk; here is the man who has a feeling of ownership with the air lines. "You mean to say you can go with a dhoti ?" you ask innocently. "Why not ? It is our national dress ; I always

like to attend even formal dinners.... For instance, when I was in Paris last year..." where many ambassadors were present this gentleman sat down to his dinner in shirt and dhoti. "People stared at me, that is all; let them" he concludes. He likes to have people stare at him ; in fact, he thrives on it. If others value elaborate dressing up he at once advocates simplicity, because that is the only way of removing himself from the common line of thinking. If others advocate simplicity he is bound to strike out an independent line for himself. "Don't imagine we can go up before others like clowns. We have to observe certain proprieties, remember." He would advocate an international outlook till a lot of others also joined his way of thinking, when he might suddenly say, "All this talk of internationalism is all very well, but we must first think of our own homes.... I have seen these folk at the conferences ; each is interested in his own affairs. I tell you they are no good. We must set our house in order before we think of anything else."

## A BOOKISH TOPIC

My blackest thoughts are reserved for those who borrow my books. I am unable to forgive a man who fails to return a book he has taken from my shelf. I would not hesitate to tell him precisely what I thought of him, if he would only give me a chance to speak, but as a general rule the book pirate shows no inclination to continue his friendship with me; he stoops beside his hedge and remains still until I have safely passed his gate; if he meets me on the road face to face he doubles his pace with an air of one going desperately in search of a doctor. It is a matter of life and death to someone, and he has no time now to engage himself in any conversation centering round some miserable book borrowed in a weak moment. This is the worst of the book pirate. He begins to feel that it was due to some weakness that he ever entertained the idea of perusing such and such a book, while a busy man like him could find no time even to read his (neighbour's) newspaper fully. Later it develops into an aversion both for the book and the man who lent him it. For a few days he keeps saying, "I've not yet read it, but I'd like to, if I may." And the lender of the book, ever a generous brood, says, "Oh, yes, by all means keep it. You have kept it so long, it'd be pointless if you returned it without going through it. Keep it, keep it." And then at the next meeting the leader feels delicate to ask again about the book. A few month pass, and then a happy New Year, and another happy one, and suddenly you realise that the

gap in your book shelf is still there. And then one day you abruptly begin the meeting with: "Where is the book?"

"Which, book?" asks the gentleman.

When you have succeeded in stimulating his memory, he only says: "Oh, that! I will have to search for it." Naturally you don't like the tone, and say: "Well, why not search now?" "Oh, not now. I'm...you see, I'm very busy now." Your instinct now tells you that you will never see your book again. You feel that you are now seeing humanity at its worst. Words fail you. You cannot trust yourself to say anything further and you go away. At the next meeting the man says brazenly, with an air of condescending to give a thought to your subject: "I've not found your book. I was out of town for a while on business. I believe it must be with my brother-in-law; you know my brother-in-law?"

"I don't; why don't you get it back from him?"

"I will, I will, certainly," he replies mechanically.

"Or I will myself go and beg him to return it, where is he?"

"That's what I must find out. He has been on a tour."

"Why not send him a letter? I will bear the postal expenses."

Oh, letters are no good; he is a very bad correspondent."

The whereabouts of the book, you feel, are already trailing away into indefiniteness. At the next meeting—but there can be no next meeting, the gentleman goes behind his hedge and disowns you completely.

It is under this condition you become a misanthrope, and ask why it is that you cannot complain to the police

about the loss of your book. In a more perfectly arranged world, it should be possible. At the next election, my vote goes to the party which pledges itself to eliminate (along with illiteracy, poverty and disease) book-borrowing from our society. I am scrutinising every manifesto and party programme for this possible promise.

All of us love to keep our books, and also share the delight of good reading with others. This is an impossible combination and turns out to be a painful experiment. If you love your book, don't lend it to anyone on earth. This really ought to be one's guiding principle. You cannot lend your books and yet have them just as you cannot eat your cake and have it. I know of only one person who has achieved both. He lends books and yet retains his library in shape. He has an elaborately built-up library at home, and he is most enthusiastic in lending out books—provided the borrower, even if he happens to be his own son-in-law, signs a ledger and returns the book on the proper date. He levies a fine of six pies per day if the book is held over beyond the due date ; and he ruthlessly demands replacement of any book that's lost. If he should be told: "My brother-in-law must have taken it and I don't know where he is," he would have replied: "Surely you wouldn't have allowed your brother-in-law to walk away with one of your chairs, coats or spoons. How dare anyone think that he can be as irresponsible as he likes where a book is concerned ? Don't tell me about your brother-in-law. I'm interested only in my book. It costs nine and six plus postage. Write at once to so and so, booksellers." This book lover has been called rude, pugnacious, petty-minded and so forth. But it does not bother him. He knows where his favourite volumes are to be found at any given moment.

As an author my problem is a little more complicated. I have (or rather try to have), in my shelf, not only books written by others but also those written by me. An author may be pardoned if he likes to have his own books, too, in his library. It may not all be vanity. He may have to work further on it for a subsequent edition, or he may value it for being the first copy to arrive from his publishers. A publisher gives only six copies for presentation when a book comes out. While I am prepared to scatter five abroad I like to be left free to keep the sixth. But where is it? Whenever I wish to see any of my own books for any purpose, I borrow it from a library. I wish others would also do the same thing instead of asking complacently, "Why should an author want his own books?"

## TEARS OF A CROCODILE

I think the crocodile is the most neglected in all God's creation. I have spent a considerable amount of thought on this subject. There is no reason why I should think of crocodile rather than of any other being. It is inexplicable. Crocodiles have always fascinated me. I never miss a chance to watch the creature as it sprawls on its rock beside the dirtiest pond conceivable, looking a geological rather than a zoological specimen, unstirring as if held in a trance. I never miss any reference to them in the newspapers. I recently read of a crocodile shot in a river, which, when opened, revealed a sad and significant collection of gold and silver jewellery worth several thousand rupees. Now to whom does this collection belong? To the state under the Treasure Trove Act? Or to the survivors if they can establish their claims? Or does it all go to the man who shot the crocodile? What does a crocodile thing? I am sure it has its own values, triumphs, hopes and despairs. If it could speak, it would probably say: "I am tired of people's reference to my tears. The worst thing about human beings is that they get into habitual ways of thinking and never outgrow them. Because some fool seems to have imagined us in tears, now no one can think of a crocodile without tears. Whose fancy it was at first I should like to find out sometime, at least in my next *janma*."

"A mistiness comes over my eyes when I am excited. You will not believe it. For all my calm appearance my

heart palpitates with anticipation when I hear footsteps approach the water's edge. My real tears stream down copiously only when I realise that the approaching feet have not proceeded but planted themselves on land. Some days it happens thus—the worst than can happen to a crocodile racked with hunger. I dare not go up on land. My feet become immobile there and I feel weak and unhappy. Give me the shallowest puddle, and there you will see me behave like Samson. On land I am like Samson minus his locks. That is how God has made us, and let us not question God's plans. Anyway I have no business on land. I have no problem of accommodation as long as a few gallons of water are left on this earth. I feel disconcerted when I hear scientists say that this planet is fast drying up, but it is going to affect only posterity, and not us. I am not prepared to bother my mind with such a distant problem."

"When I am satisfied with my rations and the air is pleasantly drizzly, I feel I want nothing more in life. Under those conditions I can really smile, a smile extending from ear to ear, a smile that may do credit to any tooth-powder advertiser. Then they will talk of a crocodile smile. If you like to see this you will have to come into my moss-screened pond. I extend to you a most cordial invitation to visit us.... They would not leave even this water alone although the bacteriologist shouted from housetops that no one should come near this water and himself came down to prove it. Where is that bacteriologist? Don't ask me. I may make a mistake sometime, but generally I never go near a scientist. They are needed for human progress and I would not like to disturb that arrangement. I hope you will not find a single test tube within me although you may see there a

bangle or two. These women with their pitchers ! They won't leave any water alone. It seems the village policeman found his wife missing. They made a lot of fuss about it. The policeman waited for a week and married again. I could hear the pipes and drums blazing ! I think women were generally happy to lose the first Mrs. Policeman. For though the gossips gathered around my pond and were eloquent as ever, the loudest and nastiest among them was missing. I have tried to serve the village in my own way. Do you remember the tiger which tasted human blood once and promoted itself into a man-eater and prowled about the village every night ? It was not the *shikari*, though he made so much noise with his gun, who disposed of it. It disappeared, that is all you know. I was the last to see him. He came to the pond to wash down his ill-gotten dinner when the *shikari*, after making all that row with his blunderbuss, was snoring loudest in the village."

"I rue the day I snapped at an ankle which was the local Gama's. He ate a thousand almonds and drank the milk of four cows at a time. Why he should have come to wash his feet at our pond of all places — just my fate. He swore at me and without so much as a second look dragged me along to the village square as if I were an old shoe attached to his feet. There at the square he called up the people, delivered a lecture on physical culture, plucked me out of his ankle and dashed me to the ground. I felt like a damp cloth in a *dhobi*'s hand."

"Out of my hide they made a suitcase which you are buying now for your air journey to San Francisco on your cultural mission. I bid you Godspeed. I hope you will not let them look into me any more for all the vanished people of the village."

"But for this Gama ! He was mightier than that elephant who was saved by Vishnu himself. Would you believe it, it was really my great grandfather that had attempted to swallow the epic elephant wholesale. We are very proud of this record. He would not have relaxed his grip but for the interference from God himself...."

## CHAIRBORNE

It is said of ancient musicians that while practising they surrounded themselves with closely arranged sword points in order to avoid unnecessary movements, flourishes of the arms and shaking of the head, all of which, though necessary concomitants of self-forgetful music, are considered undesirable in the *shastras*. I mention this now, not in order to talk about musicians, but about a type of person who, though not a musician, has all the time the feeling of being surrounded with daggers — so little does he move his body ! He appears to have around him a perfect forest of sharp points and he seems to think that unless he remains still he is likely to hurt himself. He is the most static person I have ever seen. The moment he rises from bed he occupies an easy chair and calls for his coffee, and then takes just one or two very essential strides across a room to his car waiting outside. He sinks into his car's seat, goes up a lift and sinks into another chair in his office, and reverses the process at the end of the day. For a change, he may transfer himself to a club lounge or a cinema seat. Some of his more active friends, seeing his vegetating propensity, have named him "the chairman." They sometimes ask him what is the difference between a hedge and himself. "None," he replies, and adds, "there ought to be no difference either. Human beings ought to imitate the vegetable kingdom more and more. If they do so they will find that they can live up a thousand years like any margosa or banyan." According to him, mankind wears

itself out by performing a lot of unnecessary movements. He interprets the development of modes of transport as a process that will help mankind evolve toward the state of trees.

As may be expected, he does not believe in exercise. All forms of exercise, according to him, are superfluous. He is aghast at the amount of strain that athletes voluntarily undergo. "As children or boys, of course, we cannot help running, jumping or swinging a racket ; but, unless you drop all this activity in time, you will be tearing out your heart muscles little by little and end your existence between fifty and sixty, while you might well live to be a hundred without any difficulty." He wonders why people try to learn swimming. Man need not go near water except in a boat ; why should he train himself for an amphibious existence, of all things ? He dislikes walking. He does not believe that it is one of the lightest forms of exercise. He is convinced that more human beings have been destroyed by indiscriminate walking than by war or pestilence. "Picking up a stick and putting one foot behind another !" This very picture puzzles and amuses him ; he is convinced that the first person who suggested it must have done it out of a motive of revenge or mischief. He can understand people who have to walk out of necessity. He has no objection to a man running if he has a tiger behind him !

He disbelieves in the pursuit of health also. He believes that a minimum of health is necessary but that too much of it is a bother. He feels irritated when he finds anyone striving for too much health. A little cold, an occasional upset, a slight headache and temperature, an aversion to food are all God-given and must not be shirked. He hates those who relentlessly pursue health,

weighing their calories, watching their vitamins and charting out their exercises, "watching themselves in a mirror all the time" so to speak.

"If you sit still, you have every chance of surviving your furniture," he said, and it sums up his philosophy. One might be curious to know what shape this man has attained by practising his principles. I need not describe it : I leave it to the imagination of my readers.

## HEADACHE

Of all the blessings conferred on mankind by a benign providence, the most useful is the headache. But for it there would be many great embarrassments in life. Factual explanations are not always either palatable or feasible. In such circumstances headache acts as a sort of password. I remember at school, the very first letter-writing lesson I was taught was : "Respected sir, As I am suffering from headache, I request you to grant me leave...." I always wondered what made our teacher select headache as an excuse, even in a specimen letter. I think it was very much in everybody's thoughts, useful alike to the pupils, and their masters. For us a headache was a boon. We used to have drill after school hours (which I still think is an unfair and undesirable practice). We disliked this hour. On the drill ground almost all appeared to be afflicted with "Splitting headache, sir," and our drill instructor put an end to it by decreeing one day, "Those suffering from headache will hold up their arms." It raised our hopes, but he added, "Since I wish to detain them for some special exercises that will cure their headache." Not one lifted his arm. At which the instructor declared, "Now all of you take off your coats and get through the usual drill. I am glad to find that the class is going to exercise in full strength today."

Headache gives the sufferer a touch of importance. All other aches sound crude and physiological, and sensitive people would not mention them. No other ailment can be so openly mentioned with impunity. You could

mention headache in the most elegant social gathering and no one would be shocked by it. The only expression which is superior to headache is 'indisposition.' Whenever I see that word I wonder what it exactly means. It is one of those curious words (like 'inanity' which has no 'anity'), which do not necessarily mean the opposite without the 'in'. You cannot say, "Owing to disposition I am not taking the medicine," whereas you can say, "Owing to indisposition I called in the doctor." What exactly is this indisposition? I have never been able to understand it, except that it sounds very well in press notes or health bulletins or in messages from eminent men to gatherings to which they have been invited. Indisposition cannot generally be said by the person directly afflicted. It does not sound very well for anyone to write directly, "Owing to indisposition, I am not attending your meeting." It sounds unconvincing. It sounds better in the third person. It implies that the gentleman is an eminent one, has a secretary or a deputy who can speak for him. "Mr. so-and-so regrets his inability to attend the meeting today owing to indisposition." People will understand and accept the statement and will not question, "What is that indisposition? Is he down with flu or malaria or cold or rheumatism? I know a doctor who can cure it...." On the contrary, they just accept it at its face value and pass on to the next item. Indisposition could be used only at a particular level, not by all and sundry. A schoolboy who says, "As I'm indisposed, I want to be let off," will have his ear twisted for his precociousness.

I think I should shock mankind if I suddenly said, "There is no such thing as headache or indisposition. It is all just an excuse, an elegant falsehood, for have I not

seen dozens of headache cases walking or driving about gaily, to be seen everywhere except where they ought to be at the particular hour!" The world is not yet ripe for such outspokenness. A man cannot say, "I am not attending the meeting today since I don't feel like it." A clerk who writes to his master, "I am not attending the office today because I am not inclined to look at any paper today," will lose his job, whereas he is quite at liberty to say that he is down with headache.

Headache is essential for maintaining human relationship in working order. We cannot do without it either at home or in public. In any normal household one can see a variety of headaches, curtaining off a variety of uncomfortable situations. The mother-in-law, who forswears her food on the plea of a splitting head, is clearly not on the best of terms, at least for that day, with the daughter-in-law or her son; the son, who pleads headache, may want to keep away not only his friends and officers, but would like his wife not to press him too much to fulfil his promise to take her out; the little man who pleads headache has definitely skipped his homework, and would like the tutor to be sent away. As I have already said, it will not do at all to be bluntly truthful on all occasions. The sign of cultured existence is not to pry too deeply, but accept certain words at their face value, as expressed by the speaker.

Headache has become such a confirmed habit that a huge trade has developed in providing a cure for it. Some people feel lost unless they carry a tube of some headache remedy in their pockets all the time, and opticians give glasses guaranteed to relieve headache. These are instances to show that mankind easily begins to believe in its myths.

## THE CRITICAL FACULTY

The critical faculty is the most potent one in the human make-up. Its pervasiveness and force have not properly been recognised because, like breathing, it is so much a part and parcel of human activity. The difference between a simpleton and an intelligent man, according to the man who is convinced that he is of the latter category, is that the former wholeheartedly accepts all things that he sees and hears while the latter never admits anything except after a most searching scrutiny. He imagines his intelligence to be a sieve of closely woven mesh through which nothing but the finest can pass. The critical sense is essential for keeping social transactions in a warm state. Otherwise life would become very dull and goody-goody. The critical faculty is responsible for a lot of give and take in life. It increases our awareness of our surroundings ; it sounds dignified no doubt, but it seems also to mean that we can watch someone else's back better than our own ! We never know our own defects till they are pointed out to us, and even then we need not accept them. We always question the *bona fides* of the man who tells us unpleasant facts. On the surface it is all very well to say, "I want an honest criticism ; that will help me, not blind compliment." I wish people would mean it. In my experience I have met only one person who took my views literally and tore up the story that he had brought to me for an opinion. He could very well have turned round and said, "The stories you write are certainly no better. I see no reason

why I should accept your judgment," but he tore up his manuscript into minute bits and scattered them out of the window, and turned his attention to other things immediately, and later became a distinguished anthropologist. His book on the subject, a respectable demisise volume priced at thirty shillings, is about to be published by a famous press. I sometimes flatter myself with the thought that perhaps it was my critical sense that helped the young man turn his energies to a vocation that suited him best. However, it is an isolated instance and not likely to occur again. No one ever accepts criticism so cheerfully. Neither the man who utters it nor the one who invites it really means it. Any artistic effort has a lot of ego behind it and can never admit criticism. The only two categories that a writer or a musician recognises are those that admire and those that do not have the wits to understand. It takes several years of hardening experience for a writer to become really indifferent to what others say about his work, but at the beginning of his career every writer watches for reviews of his book with a palpitating heart. If the review is all praise, then the author feels that the reviewer is a clever fellow full of subtle understanding, but if it is adverse he cries, "These fellows lack elementary intelligence and discrimination! I don't know why some papers give the reviewing work to their office boys."

I have discovered that a lot of interest that people show in each other's affairs comes just out of a desire to exercise their critical faculties and to measure how far below one's own the other's achievement is. It is particularly applicable to those in the same profession. It is only an engineer who can properly deprecate another engineer's handiwork. I have noticed that anyone who

has recently built a house shows an undue zeal in inspecting every new house that he can possibly reach. It gives him a lot of pleasure to be able to say, "Oh, lord ! How that contractor has cheated the poor man ! What a lot of space they have wasted, and what hideous pillars on the verandah ! I wish he had seen my house before starting on his own !"

The democratic machinery is kept going through the exercise of the critical faculty. If someone should ask, "How should an opposition function ?" the best answer would be, "In the manner of a traditional mother-in-law who watches the performance of household work by a daughter-in-law and follows her about with her comments."

## WILDLIFE

The trigger-happy man (by a curious mistake in typing this came through as *tiger*-happy, which is an example of inadvertent aptness) wanted to know why there is such a fuss all over the country about wildlife. In his humble view, wildlife as its very name suggests, has been created by God in order to be eradicated. His view is that life threatens to be wild enough, why should anyone take all the trouble to encourage it further ?

We are likely to feel a little disturbed at the thought that there are only two-hundred-odd lions left in the Gir forests, and three hundred rhinos for the whole country, which works out to less than 1/20,000th of a lion or rhino per head of our population. This is a most distressing piece of statistics, although the figures I have derived may not be very accurate. Although we might prefer not to encounter the lion or the rhino except in well-defined places and at proper distance, still an ineffable sadness seizes us when we hear about their population. It is part of the jungle kinship we have within us. When I see the gentleman with the gun proudly posing for a sort of family group with a dead tiger at his feet, my reaction is not pride that a fellow being has in the long run proved himself more ferocious than the tiger, but pity for the poor animal that it should have come to his notice at all ; incidentally, I also speculate what the group photo would have turned out to be if the gun had slipped from his hand or if the *machan* had been a few inches lower.

My reaction is that of a sentimental non-*shikari*, but the trigger-happy huntsman views it differently. He at once tries to find out by close scrutiny of the photograph where the bullet hit, whether the tiger was shot before it killed the kill or after (there is actually a double murder in every such instance), and whether the length of the tiger might not after all be 8.5 feet rather than 9.75 feet. In the hunter's world a few inches make all the difference. I heard from a man in the line that he is attempting a revolution in the *shikar* world by proposing that the tail should be left out while measuring a dead tiger ; he maintains that the length of a tail can be no indication of the bigness of a tiger, and that a short stubby tiger has every chance of waving a sweeping tail. For this heresy I fear he has been blackballed out of most service clubs.

The trigger-happy man takes an original view of all animal life in general. The question of lions in the Gir forest : he still feels that they are still too many by two hundred odd, and if they are not already undergoing a further reduction in numbers it is because they are out of his range. You may point out that there are stringent laws against the killing of lions in the Gir forest, but it only provokes his mirth. He repeats in his tolerant, good-humoured way, the good old political philosophy, "Sir, laws are for men and not men for laws. Didn't you see how forty lions were found dead sometime ago in that very forest ? They broke the law, I suppose !" I don't know what he meant, but I suppose he implied that their death was due to the work of a clever man like himself. He is a man who has no affection for the laws of the forest. He thinks that they all proceed on the basis of causing him annoyance, and he has his own means of

circumventing them. I happened to be with him once in a certain reserve area, where no shooting was permitted. We came upon a whole family of deer grazing on a slope. Our friend at once fell into a deep whispering excitement and feverish activity, which ended in his raising his gun and firing, but fortunately, as if in answer to my secret prayers, he missed his aim. I told him that he ought not to have aimed in that area, but his explanation was ingenious : "There is no rule forbidding the taking of aim. I only took aim."

"But you sent a shot—."

"But it didn't hit anything ! It may be blank bullet, after all. There is no law against the sending off of a blank shot even in a reserve area." He packed all the contempt he could into the expression 'reserve area.'

"But suppose you had hit it ?" I asked.

"What guarantee is there that it'd have died here ? It might have after all, dragged itself a few yards off, and died quietly within bounds for shooting, after all what proof have you that the animal belongs here?" It was impossible to argue with him. He was too well versed in technicalities. He displayed a nimble legal mind where shooting animals was concerned, and he could find a dozen ways of evading all regulation. I tried to appeal to his humanity on another occasion, when he brought down a tremendous bison, which stood at a far-off clearing, looking more like a statue carved out of black stone than a living creature. It was painful to watch it expire. But since I had gone with him as his guest, I could not moralise too much. So I merely mumbled, "It was so grand!"

"Yes, but it will look grander when it comes out of the taxidermist's," he said, not cynically ; but he seemed

really to believe that a bison improved its appearance by getting shot and stuffed. The hunter he is, he feels cheated out of a legitimate victory when someone talks to him in the manner I do. He wailed, "You protest when I shoot a deer, well, that's understandable. But you say the same thing when a bison is shot. This is what I can't understand."

"Why not leave the poor thing alone?"

"Poor thing! You have no idea what it can do?"

"Anyway it did nothing to us now."

"Yes, because I saw it first."

## BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

It has become a fashion to choose the beauty queen of the year in each place, but her majesty's reign is strictly limited in tenure and jurisdiction. For instance, the beauty queen of 1951 may be forgotten an hour after the 31st of December, I suppose. Or the beauty queen of, say, California, may hardly receive recognition in Calcutta. Presently we may have a beauty queen selected for each month, who will not be looked at when her hour has passed. A surprising philosophical admission seems to be implied in all this scheme — the utter evanescence of all appearance. It seems a rash, unpractical activity all the same. Even for the briefest duration, how could anyone fix "the most beautiful?" "The young one is a golden pet for even the cow," says the Tamil proverb. What a parent sees, other definitely don't. It is not merely confined to appearance, but also to accomplishments and quality. "My little fellow, you know, is very smart ; oh, that fellow is terribly mischievous." This may be said of an infant which still lies flat on its back, kicks its legs and emits gurgling sounds. The fond parents are able to interpret so much in that sound and movement and look, although to a rank outsider it may mean nothing. A parent is openly boastful when his offspring is only a few months old, and he keeps it up till the child is five or six years old. Thereafter he adopts a little reticence, and gradually gives up openly boasting of his son's unique qualities ; the parents may be reticent, but you may be sure they have not, inwardly,

moved a jot from the standpoint they assumed when they declared to a polite-minded rank outsider, "See him, don't you think he is too clever and understanding for his age? And I'm sure he is the most lovely." And the rank outsider peeped into the crib with the appropriate show of agreement, although having his own views in the matter.

But a rank outsider has no place in the assessment of beauty of either personality or person. That is why any elaborate Beauty Contest, with judges, fills me with wonderment. How can beauty be judged by means of tape and weighing machine? Perception of beauty seems to be an entirely personal matter, peculiar to each individual and even to each country. This is the reason why we remain unmoved when we see in our newspapers photographs of beauty queens of other lands. What is beautiful in one country or in one part of the country may be viewed differently in another. Among certain aborigines piercing the upper lip and rivetting on it several layers of metal discs is considered indispensable for any lady of social standing. In our part of the country nose-ornaments are very popular, and not so in the north; green eyes and red hair are probably considered masterly touches of nature in the West, while we think they handicap a girl's future.

It's not only in a perfectly measuring figure, but also in features that real beauty is to be perceived ; and this perception may turn out to be a highly individual view. For this reason a photo-finish for deciding beauty is not feasible. The eye of the camera, though perfect in judging neck-to-neck of horses, is no better judge than the human eye, where human beauty is concerned, for the simple reason that its data, once again, will have to be verified and accepted only by us. The camera cannot be

an absolute instrument of perception. Sometimes people look better than their photographs and sometimes photographs are better than the originals. It is for this reason that any astute would-be bridegroom refuses to be led away by photographs when he has to make up his mind, but insists upon holding over his decision till he has a chance to view the girl, which becomes really a turning point in any young man's life. It is all, as anybody knows, elaborately staged and arranged. The girl is decked and dressed in her best. She is induced by her parents and sisters to come forward and show herself properly. The young man has to watch the curtain or the doorway through which she has to come with the greatest anxiety and curiosity, and yet not seem to watch, for the sake of propriety. The girl may come up and take a seat opposite, but it does not help the young man. He is afraid to stare and judge. He is for the moment a beauty judge, but handicapped by proprieties which will not let him stare and assess. All his impressions will have to be finalised by darting looks and side glances, while keeping up a general flow of conversation with a lot of uninteresting people around. When the interview is over, the man is tortured with the feeling that he wasted precious moments which ought to have been spent in proper scrutiny. "I didn't notice whether her nose was slightly arched or straight." He wishes he could have another look before saying yes or no. But few get such a chance. And even if a man says "yes" with a lot of secret misgivings, he never displays any regret later in life. He has no doubt that he has made the right choice. It is this that led a cynic to define beauty as something we derive when we have got used to the beast. There must be some degree of truth in this statement. Other-

wise no one except a handful of universally acclaimed paragons can ever have a chance of marrying and settling in life.

It'd be interesting if somebody sponsored a world ugliness contest. If ugliness, too, could have a commercial value I'm sure it would find its sponsors : a sweater-making company which can declare, "We will make you look like the devil," a draper or outfitter who can say, "We will make you look like a tub," a railway or a bus service claiming, "Two-hours journey on our lines will transform you into a ogre," a film producer looking for ghoulish players or a hat-manufacturing company intent upon making people look like fools. In due course many may sigh for that bulbous nose or the tapering forehead which gave the winner of the contest his holiday in Europe, his photograph in the papers and the film contract at the end of it all.

## UPSTARTISM

I recently heard someone remark, "This is an age of upstartism." It sounded novel, and made me search for its significance. I was familiar with upstart but not with upstartism. We often hear the word 'upgraded' (a particularly favourite expression with medical organizations; they are somehow averse to using the simple word 'improved,' which is probably too straightforward to possess any dignity; we seem to need for our present-day existence expressions which have a mayoral-robe-like weight). I thought at first that upstartism was one such. On inquiry I realized that it was not such a mere ornament as it seemed at first. The man who uttered it seemed to know what he was saying. By engaging myself in a talk with him I was rewarded with a clear picture of upstartism. Of course, upstartism expresses itself through a human being. An upstart is a creature of favourable circumstances. If his circumstances were otherwise no one would have an opportunity to detect this special quality in him. The upstart remains unnoticed till he suddenly becomes successful in his endeavour. No one would have called him an upstart if he had always been successful. There is a dangerous similarity between a normal man of success and an upstart which is likely to lead a casual observer to confuse one with the other, but closer inspection will reveal essential and subtle points of difference, as are seen between a peacock and a turkey, though both fan out their tails. It would be very well indeed for the world if people could

come to the stage of openly declaring : "It is my greatest desire in life to become an upstart." When that happens we may take it as a sign that all human utterance has become truthful. Why should not a person say that he wishes to be an upstart just as he may unhesitatingly say that he wishes to be a lawyer, doctor or a journalist? I asked, "Who is this upstart that you are talking so much about?" My friend gave the startling reply, "Every other man is an upstart and the one who isn't will soon be one." He was convinced that it is only by a study of upstartism that you could have a proper understanding of the course of history. History is full of upstarts. It is the upstart who gives the necessary kick to events when human existence reaches the verge of stagnation. It is the upstart who feels restless in his own surroundings, and discontented with the boundaries of not only his personality but of his country. It makes him work his way up and about till he rises, attempts conquests, and creates forces and counterforces that make history.

For all *up*-words there are *down*-words also. We have upstart. Do we have downstartism ? Yes, said my specialist. When the upstart has reached his maximum height, the power within him decreases, and he starts his downward career. At this point, he should be called a downstart. It is an occasion which ought to stir more pity and sympathy for the man, just as a lot of envy and dull anger is roused whenever he is seen careering himself up. The downstart may be defined as a falling upstart, pictured like the stick of a rocket, whose final descent and destination pass generally unnoticed.

What are the characteristics of an upstart ? He is one who generally feels, "All the world owes me a living." The world outside has no meaning for him except as a

storehouse of opportunities. If the world accords recognition to this philosophy, it keeps itself on the right side of the man and enables him to live with the rest of humanity, if not on terms of affection at least in terms of patronage and condescension. Otherwise he will be found saying that the world is not a fit place to live in. If the upstart were to be asked, "After the world has given you your living according to what you expect of it, how will you treat it?" "With indifference," should be the upstart's reply if he could speak truthfully, but he cannot afford to say so. He will probably say, "I am always the servant, and I seek new means of serving the world. I never tire of it. However much I may do I am still racked with the thought that I have not done enough to make the world brighter and happier." He has not the slightest doubt that he is the bearer of all the light that the world needs. His views on himself are well defined and may be had for the asking. He feels that humanity needs his wise guidance every moment. He feels he can have his say in any matter and in any manner he chooses. He is ever prepared to tell everyone what to do and how to do it. If he gets an opportunity he will not hesitate to tell an expert musician how to sing, an engineer how to build, a gardener how to plant, a general how to fight, a clown how to amuse, and God himself how to manage the universe. His attitude cannot be defined as arrogance. It is more self-assurance, an abnormal amount of it. So much of it has rather to be admired. The world has derived no sort of benefit from the squeamish, the hesitant and the timid, while most of its liveliness it owes to the man who attempts to upgrade himself all the time.

## MEMORY

It is said of Faraday that he was so absent-minded that he was constantly writing on slips of papers reminders of what he should be doing next. His pockets were stuffed with hundreds of these slips ; there they rested untouched, for there was no way of reminding him of the existence of the slips. Men of genius are particularly absent-minded. They have reason for it ; their minds are engaged in noble pursuits. It is understandable. But why should we ordinary mortals also be afflicted with it ? Faces of persons : "Your face is familiar," is the elegant formula which covers an unpardonable lapse. A face seen every day behind a counter in a bank or a post office becomes unrecognisable in the street. "He is a pleasant and helpful person, but where have I seen him before ?" you wonder secretly. It would be a pity if this caused any bitterness, for no one is to be blamed for it. We are all at the mercy of an erratic faculty : memory. It proves particularly treacherous where proper names are concerned. You go about feeling confident that all the names you need are properly labelled and stocked in your mind, and that you can call up any at will. The occasion arises. In the middle of a dignified and fluent sentence you realise that you cannot get at a particular name. Your ideas scatter, and you become incoherent while you frenziedly pursue the name that recedes like a chimera. Others look on and smile half sceptically as you tear your hair and wail "It was on my lips a moment ago." You are now in an awkward situation, as if you had been

tripped from behind. Later when there is no occasion for it, the name will intrude itself on your attention and will not leave till you repeat it irrelevantly.

There are numerous suggestions as to how memory can be developed. I have found none of these tips practicable. Most of them are based on what may be called associative thinking. It works in the following manner : I am unable to remember 14. All that I have to do now is to remember 13 on one side and 15 on the other. Or, taking another instance, if I cannot recollect where I left my bunch of keys, all that I must do is to sit back and mentally go over every place I visited the last three or four hours. This exercise will leave an ordinary man so exhausted at the end that he will have little interest in his lost possession, and by itself it seems such a feat of memory that those who are capable of it are not likely to misplace things.

Forgetfulness is but one side of the question. The other side is remembering too well. The misery engendered by remembrance is no less keen than that brought on by forgetfulness. Many things stick in our mind which we would rather be rid of. On such occasions memory is more like a sieve which lets out what we want and retains what we would rather throw out.

The child under four is acknowledged on all hands to be an ideal being--a creature who has an almost unearthly delight in living. He is able to attain this grand state because he is unaware of the existence of the thing called memory. He has no clear-cut notions of past and future. Many of his plans and aspirations are set in a yesterday, and many of his achievements are placed in a tomorrow. He hardly remembers anything that has happened in the last hour. If he only remembers the

admonitions given him by his elders, the physical ills he has suffered and the frustration of his little life, he would cease to be a child. However, he is not left in this happy condition very long. Presently the home tutor comes along with his multiplication table and rules of grammar ; henceforth he must study and remember. From this moment existence becomes an endless hide-and-seek between him and memory till old age overtakes him. By the time he reaches seventy-five his mind has turned itself into a vast jumble of memories which makes the immediate life around entirely unacceptable to him.

It is for this reason, I suppose, that poets have always cried for the mercy of oblivion. For, in our present stage of evolution, we have not yet understood the precise use of this power. It is like having a storage battery on hand for no special purpose. The result is that we constantly suffer from too much of it or too little of it, and have no clear notion as to whether we are the masters of this faculty or its servants.

## WHAT IS CHOSS ?

I noticed a nephew of mine, a somewhat precocious fellow, often using a word sounding like chose. I thought at first that it signified the past tense of choose. Though it sounded like chose it was really cho, with the rest finished up with trailing-off sibilants. Spelt, it would be more accurate to put it down as choss.

I asked : "Little man, what is choss ?"

"Choss ? Don't you know what it is ?" He looked surprised that there should be any one ignorant of it. I pressed him to define it. He merely replied, "Choss is choss, that is all," and dismissed the inquiry there. I could not even gather whether the word was a compliment or a curse. "Is choss good or bad ?" I asked testingly, so as to be able to understand it at least in its broad category. He replied, "I don't know."

"If you don't know, why do you say choss ?" I asked.

"Because it is choss," he replied.

I left him alone for some time but tackled him again later. I asked : "Will you show me choss...?" not knowing whether to say 'the' or 'a' in this connection.

"Why ?" he asked.

"Perhaps I like to see one for myself," I said. And he obliged me. We were sitting at a window watching the street. He pointed at a passer-by : "There is a choss going." I studied the man thus pointed out. He looked like anyone else in the street, only taller. "Is choss tall ?" I asked.

"Also short," the boy answered promptly.

"Can you show what exactly is choss about that man?" I pleaded.

"See his coat? It is a choss coat," the boy said.

I observed and said : "He is only wearing a rose-coloured bush coat."

"All rose-coloured stuff is choss, I don't like it," declared the boy.

"So, is choss all that you don't like?" I asked.

"I don't know," he replied.

"Do you like quinine?" I asked.

"I don't," he replied immediately.

"Is it choss?" I asked.

"No it is only bitter," he replied. I tried to elicit his aversions : castor oil, arithmetic, home teacher, the boy next door, etc., etc.—but they were not choss, he assured me, although he disliked them all intensely.

This was getting to be involved and laborious research. Gradually I came to understand what it meant. In men, women and children the choss condition arises out of a lot of innocence—too much of it. The lady who sticks large chrysanthemum flowers in her shiny, tightly braided hair, with powder showing under her eyes, may safely be classed as choss ; so also the man who is obviously correct in every way : wearing *khaddar* cap and *sherwani* for a gathering in which the Prime Minister is likely to be present, or a dress suit for meeting an American businessman at a party, or wearing thick shell frames during the day and rimless glasses at night, all because he has heard that it is the correct thing to do.... I fear I am misleading. Choss is not merely being fashionable. It is not just the actual dress : it is something more than that. It is to be perceived not only in the texture and colour and style of what one wears but also

in the outlook that accompanies it. A man may appear most gaudily dressed and yet not come under the class of choss, nor is one not choss because he appears to be simple. A man striving for simplicity as befitting his self-appointed role as a friend of the poor is as great a choss as the one who dresses elaborately out of fear of being thought not good enough for his set.

A man betrays his chossiness not only in his dress but in all his speech and action as well. The choss, when naming his new house, will devise a saccharine, sentimental one, such as wee cottage, the nest, home sweet home, etc. When selecting a Christmas card he will take the one containing a gushing verse with a creepy enamel finish on it. He will frame his B.A. degree certificate and hang it in the central hall. He will order a large bromide enlargement of himself and mount it over his own table. He will apply for interviews when celebrities visit his town and present them with garlands, bouquets and lemon, and admire all that they advocate, whether it be grow-more-food or grow-less-toenail, folk song or savage howl, tree-planting or desert-trekking. It is immaterial to him what the question is ; the important thing is that he likes to feel that he is being agreeable and socially forthcoming.

Out of a sense of duty he will mourn in public the death of a second-rate novelist as a national calamity. He will acclaim something as a masterpiece because a governor presided over the opening function and said it was so. He is ever ready to add his signature to an appeal for a memorial fund or laugh loudly at an oft-repeated joke, not because it is necessary but because he has a fear of being thought unsociable. In ancient times, when honours lists were coming out regularly, chosses

were in plenty. If the choss did not receive the long-expected title, he at least had the satisfaction of rushing off perfervid greetings to all the *dewans*, *bahadurs* and *rao sahebs* the moment he read the news. Today he is actively pursuing *bharat ratnas* and *padma vibhushanas*, and manages to occupy himself with writing personal letters to all our statesmen on their birthdays and treasuring the acknowledgments bearing their seal.

The choss quality is very subtle and pervasive and has to be extracted, like an essence, out of what is observed.

## STREET NAMES

In the India of post-1947, the most marked feature is the passion for changing names of streets, towns, parks and squares. Our men in authority seem to have come to the sudden conclusion that old names, like old clothes, are no good. We must first understand that a street is not born with a name. It is given one, say, by a donor who financed a lung-space, or of a municipal councillor who had the pluck to manoeuvre his name into it, or the first gentleman who dared to take his residence there. Through a street name one often seeks to immortalise a personality. This immortality, however, is more imagined than achieved. In the fancy of the man whose name is given to a street the public, as he thinks, will stop to ask every time the name board is seen, "Who is this Shri X. Y. Z., after whom this place is named? Must have been an outstanding personality to have his name gracing this locality." But actually usage is deadening. However grandly a name might have been devised, it is hardly noticed after some time. A minister, of course, might have presided over the function and might have unveiled the name with his own hand with a speech dwelling on the importance of streets in the five-year plan, and the important role played by Shri X. Y. Z. in the nation's life, with garlands slipping over heads, and with nearly a public holiday thrown in. But with all this, it is unfortunate but true that in course of time every passer-by will see the name of Shri X. Y. Z. but will not bother to know who he might be.

Generally speaking, a name grows up with a street and no one bothers to think what it might signify. All the significance is forgotten in the very first week following the naming ceremony. The friends and members of the family of the man may remember it for some time, and feel a glow of pride whenever they see it or think of it. But even they will get used to it in course of time, and they as well as everyone else will look at the name coldly, till it sheds all its significance and association, and the name stands by itself on its own authority, a pure name. This may not be so tragic after all. It is only a name which acquires a status, independent of all its associations and significance, that could be said to possess real vitality. For years I have been seeing a certain Ramaswami Street. Till this moment it has never occurred to me to question who he might be. It may refer to an eminent local personage, or a national figure, or an unknown, forgotten municipal councillor, or a bullock-cart driver who fell off his seat, or a first-class mathematics student who was denied a seat in engineering and stood on his head till his grievance was redressed. None of it is remembered when the name is uttered; it is just Ramaswami. No one could ever associate the street with any other title, Ramaswami becomes the street. It begins to sound almost like a common name, something like door, chair or bottle, and no one bothers to analyse why these have come to be named so. No one goes into the origin of these terms. They are just accepted as they are. When a proper name becomes common as a common name, then it may be said to have vitality, if not immortality. People must not bother to ask who was that person.

While proper names are thus reduced to insignificance, think of the actual common names which somehow come to pass. No one gives them a thought. Katcheri

Road never provokes anyone to ask, "Whose Katcheri ? Vocal or instrumental or what Katcheri ?" It's just accepted. Or Salai Street or Solai Street never provokes anyone to demand the sight of the lush vegetation that the appellation conjures up in one. There is above all the instance of Broadway. I do not think anyone has so far demanded that the irony of this term be ended and that the place be given its rightful name. It is accepted without question, not because of its rational association, but because it seems to be grown up with it, however meaningless it may be. And of course there is the classic Barbers' Bridge (which I hope now is not going to be changed to Bharat Bridge or something similar).

There must not be too much rationale in the naming of a street. This is just where members of municipal bodies and perfervid patriots go wrong. They attempt historical aptness or the righting of a historical wrong. This is generally seen in changing foreign names. Smith Lane, for instance, is always in danger of being attacked by righteous-minded persons. Someone will suddenly discover that Smith was an odious colonial administrator and transform the lane, with every pomp, to Jagadguru Lane. Apart from confounding a familiar used landmark, it only achieves one object : it gives an extra job to a signboard painter. If the authority thinks that it is likely to gratify the Jagadguru, he is grievously mistaken. The Jagadguru can well afford to ignore this honour. He has reached an eminence where this honour cannot in any way be taken as an addition to his glory. Nor, on the other hand is this change likely to make the ghost of the old despot go pale with shame and remorse. Even if it does affect the ghost, would it be legitimate to achieve the end in a country nurtured on *Ahimsa*, the essence of

which is that we should not hate our enemies, much less our dead enemies ? On the contrary, the despot's name should be left untouched just to show how his despotism has proved futile in the long run. Acrimony, contemporaneously or in retrospect, can have no place in a nation nurtured on *Ahimsa*. And will you remember, you passionate changer of street names, the tradition thus started by you may be continued by someone else coming to your place later, whose views may be different from yours ? He may take down the very names which you put up with such veneration now, elevate his own candidate and give out an equally rational explanation for it. And then what is to happen to the man who tries to find his way about the town depending upon familiar landmarks ?

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निर्गम दिनांक। जमारकर्ता की मं। *ग्रन्थालय*

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